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# EDUCATION FOR ALL

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## Role and Contribution of NGOs to Basic Education

Disha Nawani



Ministry of  
Human Resource Development  
Government of India



National Institute of Educational  
Planning and Administration  
New Delhi



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सत्यमेव जयते

MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT  
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI



NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATIONAL PLANNING  
AND ADMINISTRATION  
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## Editorial Note

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The EFA 2000 Assessment process in India was set in motion around the middle of 1999. The basic framework for the review process was given by the UNESCO. The framework consisted of eighteen indicators ranging from literacy rate and enrollment figures to allocation of finances to primary education. Information on these indicators was to form the overall framework for assessing the progress made. In India, a National Assessment Group was set up at the MHRD to coordinate the effort. The Group felt during its deliberations that mere statistical indicators will not capture the whole gamut of efforts that have gone on during the decade. It was decided that while data on the quantitative indicators will be compiled, effort will be made to carry out a qualitative review of the situation in a more comprehensive and objective manner with the help of independent reviewers.

In delineating the broad contours for the review process, developments in basic education during the EFA decade was kept as the main focus. However, it was felt that in the Indian context, a natural time period for any such review was the launching of the National Policy on Education in 1986. It is not difficult to find the rationale for this decision. In India's not so smooth journey towards the goal of UEE, National Policy on Education - 1986 stands out as a significant landmark. The NPE had been formulated after conducting a prolonged nationwide debate on the problems and issues confronting the education system in the country. Further, along with the formulation of the policy a "Programme of Action" was adopted which clearly outlined the strategies and processes to be pursued for achieving UEE. This was followed by a framework of partnership between the Central and State Governments on a massive scale through a number of Centrally Sponsored Schemes. With this in the backdrop, any review of EFA will virtually be a reflection on the implementation of recommendations made by the NPE. Thus, for the present qualitative review, though the 1990's remain the focus, developments in the post-NPE period form the larger canvass.

As is well known, 1990's saw the opening of the primary education scene to external assistance on a fairly large scale. Possibly as part of the commitments made by the international donor community at the Jomtien Conference, the country saw the emergence of a large multi-State programme for EFA under the banner of District Primary Education Programme. Alongside this, Rajasthan initiated a fairly large programme of EFA under the name of *Lok Jumbish*. In the changed scenario, primary education in India truly became a subject of international scrutiny. The EFA projects have been in operation, gradually expanding to cover half the country, for six to eight years. These EFA initiatives coupled with various centrally sponsored schemes have undoubtedly made 1990's the most intensive period of primary education development in India. Meanwhile, the literacy scene also got galvanized with mass literacy campaigns stretching across the length and breadth of the country through the National Literacy Mission. Therefore, any EFA assessment exercise carried out at the present juncture will throw light on the performance of these initiatives.

Another development in the last decade that forms a part of the backdrop for the review is the Supreme Court judgment which, interpreting the constitutional provisions, declared basic education as a fundamental



right of every citizen requiring the State to make necessary provisions as a basic obligation. Currently, a bill to amend the Constitution is under the consideration of the Parliament to incorporate education upto fourteen years as a fundamental right of every citizen. Simultaneously, at the international level, basic education got a prime place in the development discourse as a component of the Human Development Index brought out by UNDP. These national and international developments have transformed the status of UEE from merely being a public sector activity of the State to that of a legal obligation, societal responsibility and moral commitment. To what extent have these been operationalised will be reflected in the review of the situation.

Having drawn the broad framework for the review exercise, the National Assessment Group identified a number of themes covering a range of topics from literacy to financing of elementary education. A meeting of authors was held to discuss the process of preparing the review and to get a common perspective on the purpose and expected outcome of the exercise. The reviews are based essentially on secondary sources, which document the developments in recent years. Each paper attempts to situate the review in the larger education scene in the country and draw broad directions for the future. However, the structure of each paper was decided by the author keeping in view the theme being dealt with.

Initial drafts of the papers were shared by the authors in two Workshops attended by several Central and State Government officials, educationists and representatives of international agencies. The papers were revised based on the feedback received during the Seminars. Individual discussions were also held with several of the authors while editing the papers. Some papers were rewritten. Several papers came at the last minute with very little time to edit or revise. Therefore, one can say that the papers as shared in this series are at different stages of finality. Some authors have already indicated their desire to revise the paper. Nevertheless it was considered important that they are shared in their present form at the World Education Forum being held at Dakar, Senegal from 26-28, April 2000. Thus, these twentyone thematic review papers and four state specific case studies, listed below, form part of the country portfolio on EFA 2000 Assessment along with the national report on the current status of EFA in India.

### **Thematic Reviews**

*Adult Literacy:* Mass literacy campaigns of the NLM changed the common perception of adult education programmes and established that if done in the right manner they can influence the scene significantly. But what has been the ground reality? What has happened beyond literacy campaigns? Many scholars consider that the value of the literacy campaigns lies not so much in imparting reading and writing skills to adult illiterates but in their capacity to influence the quality of life of the people. There are three papers dealing with literacy and adult education: (1) *Indian Engagement with Adult Education and Literacy*, (2) *Literacy Campaigns and Social Mobilization*, and (3) *Changing Concepts and Shifting Goals: Post-literacy and Continuing Education in India*. Together, the papers give a retrospective overview of the concepts involved, a review of the progress made and also take a critical look at the processes adopted.

*Girls' Education:* Many consider that the problem of universal elementary education in India is essentially a problem of girls' education. The National policy on Education-1986 pointed out that the problem of girls' education can not be dealt with in isolation from the broader questions of women's status. In fact, this also led to special programmes addressing the issue of women empowerment such as *Mahila Samakhyas*. Keeping this in view, two papers are prepared: (1) *Education of Girls in India: An Assessment*; and (2) *Education*



*and the Status of Women.* The papers while sounding positive highlight the long distance yet to be traversed for achieving the goal of UEE for girls and for addressing the issue of gender equity in education.

*Early Childhood Care and Education:* Increasing empirical evidence points to the value of providing preschool experience to children not only for improving their readiness for schooling but also as part of meeting the basic needs of children. The NPE called for taking an integrated view of early childhood care and education. The paper on *Early Childhood Care and Education* examines the situation comprehensively dealing with school based pre-primary education programmes as well as the more wide spread ICDS programme.

*Reaching the Marginalised:* Data clearly point out that several groups of children continue to remain on the margin raising serious questions of equity in educational development. Many groups in India fall into this category, which include the urban poor, child workers, children of ethnic minorities, and children with special needs. Four papers deal with this issue: (1) *Children, Work and Education: Rethinking on Out-of-School Children*, (2) *Education of the Urban Disadvantaged*, (3) *Education among Tribals*, and (4) *Education of Children with Special Needs*. The four papers though on diverse themes, assess the reach of the current programmes of EFA in meeting the educational needs of the marginalised groups.

*Teacher and Teacher Education:* As the Education Commission 1964-66 pointed out, the destiny of the country is being shaped in the classrooms. And, it is the teachers who hold the key position in determining the course of transaction that takes place in schools and classrooms. Thus, an analysis of the status of teachers and their professional preparation needs a close analysis in the context of EFA. Two papers on the subject are presented: (1) *Primary Teacher Training in the EFA Decade*, and (2) *Status of Elementary Teachers in India*. The first paper takes stock of the programmes of teacher training in terms of institutional arrangements available as well as innovative efforts initiated in recent years. The second paper adopts a broad perspective on the subject and deals with different categories of teachers involved in basic education programmes.

*Teaching-Learning Material:* Curriculum and textbook preparation has come to be generally perceived as a centralized activity carried out, directly or indirectly, under the control and supervision of State Government bodies. One could see significant changes in this regard during the 1990s. The first steps in decentralizing material production to make it more locally relevant were taken by the National Literacy Mission. The EFA projects also gave tremendous impetus to the process of producing child friendly textbooks. New framework of collaboration between Government institutions and NGOs also seem to have emerged. But the area is still riddled with many critical issues. These are dealt with in the paper: *Texts in Context: An EFA 2000 Review - Development of Curricula, Textbooks, and Teaching Learning Materials*.

*Media in EFA:* The 1990s, particularly through the mass literacy campaigns, demonstrated the potential of traditional media and methods in the field of education. Use of electronic media in building a positive environment in favour of EFA efforts also got a big boost during the period. What has been the overall role of media in relation to EFA? How can the profile of media in EFA efforts be enhanced? These and other related questions have been systematically addressed in the review paper on *Role of Media in Education For All*.

*Quality of Schooling:* The NPE redefined UEE to include not only provision of universal access and universal participation but also achievement of acceptable standards of learning. This brought to centre stage issues



related to quality. Two papers address this issue: (1) *Learning Conditions for Primary Education: A Review* and (2) *Learner Achievement in Primary Schools*.

*Management Strategies for EFA:* The NPE advocated for adopting a participatory approach for educational management and considered the goal of EFA unachievable without the active involvement of the civil society. Building partnership between Government and Non-Government agencies has been repeatedly endorsed by policy makers. But what space do they really occupy in the overall EFA effort? Similarly, role of private efforts in provision of education has come for serious consideration in recent years. The new *Panchayati Raj* initiatives take management issues into the larger context of political administration. These are the themes and issues addressed in a set of four papers: (1) *Role and Contribution of NGOs to Basic Education*, (2) *Decentralisation of Education*, (3) *Role of Private Schools in Basic Education*, and (4) *Participatory Micro-Planning for Universal Primary Education*.

*Financing of Elementary Education:* The move to make basic education a fundamental right and the accompanying effort to assess the funds required for universalizing elementary education has brought to sharp focus the question of financing elementary education in India. Acceptance of relatively large size support from external funding agencies for the purpose has compounded the issue. There are some who still consider that India can and should finance its basic education from domestic sources. Expectation in some quarters that privatisation could help mobilize substantial resources for EFA has added a third dimension to the debate. These issues are dealt with in the paper: *Financing of Elementary Education in India*.

### **State Specific Case Studies**

It is fully recognized that sustainable change and development in basic education is highly conditioned by State specific contexts. Mere funds and schemes from the Centre will not guarantee the achievement of UEE goals. It is highly dependent on traditions and values of the local people; commitment and enthusiasm of the State level educational leadership; and capacity to adopt innovative approaches. Viewed from such a perspective authentic accounts of EFA achievement would demand understanding the processes, problems and prospects of achieving EFA in every State independently. But, that would have been too ambitious. In depth analysis of the situation was carried out in four selected States, namely, Himachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu. From the EFA process and achievement point of view, the four States get self-selected. Success of Himachal Pradesh came into lime light with the PROBE study which pointed out how the State has gone way ahead of some of its neighbouring States. The study on Himachal Pradesh which is aptly entitled: *Primary Education in Himachal Pradesh: Examining a Success Story*, captures the factors contributing to the relatively quick progress made by the State. The Mizoram study: *EFA in Mizoram: The Dynamics of Success* brings out the unique role played by local youth and women organizations within the background of pioneering work done by religious organizations. Tamil Nadu case study, *Progress Towards Education for All: The Case of Tamil Nadu*, presents a success story of a different kind. The overt social policies and programmes of the State, including the famous Nutritious Noon Meal Scheme, are attributed to have made a significant impact on school enrollment in the 1980s. Subsequently, with its apparent success in controlling the population growth, the state has got the opportunity to pursue quality concerns of EFA in an effective manner. Rajasthan cannot stake claim to join the company of the other three States based on quantitative progress in EFA. In the league table of States of India, Rajasthan continues to occupy a very low rank. The case of EFA in Rajasthan is entitled, *Universal Elementary Education in Rajasthan: A Study with Focus on Innovative Strategies*. The study takes a look at exemplar practices adopted in two



major programmes contributing to EFA goals, namely, *Shiksha Karmi* and *Lok Jumbish*.

The review exercise was carried out with the full involvement of the Department of Education, Government of India. I should record my thanks to the Indian National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO for giving not only full support and cooperation but also a free hand in carrying out the work. In particular, I should acknowledge the special interest taken by Mr. Champak Chatterji and Mr. Abhimanyu Singh. The task was carried out with financial assistance from UNESCO and UNDP. Support has also been forthcoming from other agencies such as UNICEF, UNFPA and the World Bank in carrying out several supportive activities involved in the exercise. Without this generous support it would not have been possible to complete the work.

In the beginning, the idea of bringing together more than twentyfive experts from across the country to contribute to the review series appeared to be too ambitious. But the personal commitment of the authors saw the whole exercise through. Editing the papers, smoothening the sharp edges and filling in the fuzzy spots, but without disturbing the integrity of the arguments of the reviewers was a challenging task. But the exercise has been done in a spirit of collaboration contributing to the common cause of achieving the goals of EFA. I would like to thank all the authors for the unhesitating professional support and friendly cooperation extended in completing the work.

The EFA 2000 Assessment process began nearly a year ago. The project including the preparation of the national EFA Report was implemented by NIEPA. Unquestioned support from the Director of NIEPA and the Administration was critical for the completion of the work. Bringing out the papers in print in record time was possible due to the total involvement of the Publication Unit of NIEPA. I should acknowledge the professional help and guidance given by Professor M.S. Yadav in editing the papers. Contribution of Dr. Mona Sedwal to the whole exercise was enormous. Working as a single person EFA Cell, she coordinated a variety of activities, apart from contributing substantially to the editing work.

The review papers may not be euphoric about the status of EFA in the country. Yet, all of them are emphatic that the 1990s have broken new grounds in almost every area of basic education whether the reference is to adult literacy, decentralized planning, improved access, preparation of teaching-learning material or reaching the marginalised. Progress during the last decade demonstrates that though difficult, the EFA goals are not unachievable. It is hoped that the objective documentation resulting from the exercise will help steer the EFA activities in the year 2000 and onwards with increased pace and intensity.

New Delhi  
April 2000

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## Abbreviations

AE	:	Alternative Education
AKES, I	:	Aga Khan Education Services
AKF	:	Aga Khan Foundation
ASTRA	:	Alternative Strategies for education for all
BGVS	:	Bal Gyan Vigyan Samiti
BIMARU	:	Bihar Madhya Pradesh Rajasthan Uttar pradesh
BSS	:	Bodh Siksha Samiti
CAPART	:	Council for Advancement of people's Action and Rural Development
CASTFORD	:	Centre for Application of Science & Technology in Rural development
CE	:	Continuing Education
CEMD	:	Center for Educational management and Development
CPC	:	Coordination and Planning Center
CRY	:	Child Relief and You
CSEP	:	Child Sponsored Education Complex Programme
DCC	:	Day Care Center
DJHS	:	Diamond Jubilee High School
DPEP	:	District Primary Education Programme
DRU	:	District Resource Unit
DST	:	Department of Science and Technology
EFA	:	Education for All
EMRP	:	Educational Management Resource Programme
ERC	:	Education Resource Centre
FCRA	:	Foreign Contribution and Regulation Act
FOSTERED	:	Forum for Science and Technology in Rural Development
GOI	:	Government of India
HSTP	:	Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme
I&IEEP	:	Innovation and Experimental Education Programme
ICSSR	:	Indian Council of Social Science Research
IFAD	:	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IIE	:	Indian Institute of Education
KSSP	:	Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad
KVIC	:	Khadi and Village Industries Corporation
LJP	:	Lok Jumbish Parishad
MEC	:	Mandal Education Committee
MHRD	:	Ministry of Human Resource and Development

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MHRD	:	Ministry of Human Resource Development
MLL	:	Minimum Levels of Learning
MSK	:	Mahila Sikshan Kendra
MS	:	Mahila Samakhya
MVF	:	M V Foundation
NCRVA	:	National Council of Rural Voluntary Agencies
NFE	:	Non Formal Education
NGO	:	Non Government Organisation
NLM	:	National Literacy Mission
NMIMS	:	Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies
OBC	:	Other Backward Classes
PL	:	Post Literacy
PRASHIKA	:	Primary Siksha Karyakaram
PROBE	:	Public Report on Basic Education
PROPEL	:	Promoting Primary and Elementary Education Programme
PTA	:	Parent Teacher Association
PTA	:	Parent teacher Association
SCERT	:	State Council of Educational Research and Training
SC	:	Scheduled Castes
SIP	:	School Improvement Programme
ST	:	Scheduled Tribes
SWRC	:	Social Work Resource Centre
TLC	:	Total Literacy Campaign
TLM	:	Total Literacy Mission
UEE	:	Universalisation of Elementary Education
UN	:	United Nations
UNDP	:	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	:	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
VDP	:	Vocational Development Programme
VEC	:	Village Education Committee
YCF	:	Young Children and Family



## Glossary

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Bal Jatra	:	Fun Fair
Bal Mela	:	Children's Fair
Balwadi	:	Pre- school Education Centre
Bhau	:	Brother in Marathi
Bhil	:	Tribal
Dhangda Basa	:	Community Hall for Tribal Girls
Dhangda Base	:	Community Hall for Tribal Boys
Gram Panchayat	:	Village Council
Gudi Ghar	:	Community Hall in Tribal Villages
Guru Bhai	:	Popular Name for Teacher
Harijans	:	Low Caste Group in India
Kala Jatha	:	A Country Wide Literacy Movement
Mahila Dakiya	:	Post Local Broadsheet Brought out by Women
Mahila Mandals	:	Women's Organisations
Nukkad Natak	:	Local Plays
Panchayat Raj	:	Local Self Government
Pitara	:	Monthly Feature of Nirantar
Sahukars	:	Moneylenders
Sakhis	:	Village Level Animators
Sangha	:	Women's Groups
Sarpanch	:	Village Head
Shikshan ani Samaj	:	Marathi Journal of IIE
Shramik Vidyapeeth	:	Workers' Seat of Learning
Sikshasandhan	:	Resource Centre for Education State Level in Bhubaneswar
Vigyan Asram	:	Science Hermitage
Yogasanas	:	Exercise for Muscle Relaxation

## Introduction

### Contextualising Non-Governmental Organisations In India

NGOs today are widely acknowledged as the new, as well as important, political actors in the developing world.<sup>1</sup> Most commentators today accept that the NGO phenomenon is a major one, though, whether it qualifies to be a 'fifth estate' is debatable.<sup>2</sup> One commentator has termed this phenomenon as a global 'associational revolution' which could well may prove to be as significant to the latter twentieth century as the rise of the nation-state was to the latter nineteenth.<sup>3</sup> Today, they have broken the trail for alternative models of development.<sup>4</sup> NGOs in India have played a variety of complex roles and have collaborated with the state, its agencies and officials to plan and implement particular development programmes. However, they have as well, questioned the role of the state in perpetuating the existing inequality and injustice, which tends to further, marginalize the poor and the oppressed.<sup>5</sup>

#### What is an NGO?

The term NGO was officially brought into being

with the passing of the resolution 288 (x) by the United Nations Economic and Social Council on the 27<sup>th</sup> February, 1950 and referred to those officially recognized organisations with no governmental affiliation that had consultative status with the United Nations (UN). This term was coined by the UN mainly to indicate the difference between the sovereign nation-states, which happen to be its direct members, and the organizations that collaborate with or receive grants from its agencies to implement developmental programmes.<sup>6</sup>

However, today its meaning incorporates an enormous variety of structures, pursuing diverse strategies, of widely differing sizes, aims or missions, and therefore, defies a precise definition. As Mazine Weisgrau has noted, the term is used rather loosely to refer to any organisation that is not a direct division of a national government.<sup>7</sup> The presence of NGOs is all encompassing, from small grassroots groups working in a small area among the people to intermediary agencies operating at a global level.

In actual usage, NGOs have been variously called - 'voluntary agencies', 'action' or 'activist groups'.

<sup>1</sup> Gerald Clarke, "Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Politics in the Developing World" in: *Political Studies*, XLVI (1998), 37.

<sup>2</sup> D. L. Sheth & Harsh Sehti, "The NGO Sector in India: Historical Context and Current Discourse", in: Kuldeep Mathur (eds). *Development Policy and Administration, Readings in Indian government and politics-1* (Sage: New Delhi, 1996), 297.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Gerald Clarke, 36.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in S. J Raj, & L. Sebasti. (eds), *Fifty years after freedom. New opportunities and challenges for voluntary action in India* (Indian Social Institute: New Delhi, 1998), 12.

<sup>5</sup> Rajesh Tandon, "Growing stateism", *Seminar*, August, 1988, 16.

<sup>6</sup> Susheela Kaushik, "The Voluntary Movement in India Since Independence: A Critique" in: S. J Raj & L. Sebasti. (eds), 64.

<sup>7</sup> Joan Mencher, "NGOs: Are they a force for change?", *EPW*, July 24, 1999, 2081.



The term NGO, therefore, does not denote a homogeneous grouping even though it is used in a more or less similar fashion. NGOs are complex and heterogeneous in nature and differ from each other in several respects. These differences could be in terms of their organisation, structure, nature, character, background, ideologies, objectives, working styles, social composition, funding or support sources, size, people they serve, regions they serve in and the relationship they share with the government.

It is only at the formal level, concerning the legalities of these bodies that they are considered one, but that is where the similarities end. In India, all these societies are registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1861, and are not expected to make profit on their activities and are considered non-governmental (i.e. they are not a part of the official machinery) and non-political (i.e. they do not directly participate in the electoral process).<sup>8</sup>

It is not that the NGOs do not share certain characteristics with each other but there are also a large number of divergent characteristics that render them a complex social phenomenon. There are not just differences among various NGOs but there are a lot of dichotomies and contradictions found among them.

For example, some of them are good intentioned, welfare-oriented while others are more fundamental in nature, aiming at bringing about radical changes in society. Some of them employ

foreign-trained professionals, while some others rely totally on indigenous resource groups. Some thrive on foreign funds, while others refuse to touch them, fearing loss of their autonomy to these agencies. Some intervene directly in the field, delivering direct services to the needy (direct action), while some others organise people in helping themselves (indirect role) or they form advocacy groups to influence the policies and programmes of the government. Some work at the grassroots level, while some others support functions of research, documentation and training. Some NGOs replicate programmes initiated by others or simply help in implementing the already existing programmes, while some others innovate and demonstrate new programmes. Some collaborate with the government, while others avoid joining hands with government.

However, diverse as they are, voluntary organisations are distinct from both public (government) and private organisations and accordingly should be brought under a common conceptual umbrella. Since voluntary organisations do not exhibit characteristics of either public or private sector organisations, the concept of yet another sector - variously called the third sector, independent sector, voluntary sector or non-profit sector is necessary to encompass all voluntary associations.<sup>9</sup> To reiterate, this new sector of agencies is fairly independent from the traditional governmental, business, political and religious influences and therefore merits special attention.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Harsh Sethi, *Redefinitions: Groups in a new politics of transformation in the non-political process*, (S, Unrisd/ Lokayan: New Delhi, 1983).

<sup>9</sup> Rohini Patel, "Voluntary organisation in India: Motivations and roles", in H. Dantwala, Harsh Sethi, & P. Visaria, *Social change through voluntary action* (Sage: New Delhi, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> D. L. Sheth, & Harsh Sethi, in. Kuldeep Mathur, (eds), 280-301.



## Evolution of NGOs

Voluntary movements have been the forerunners of modern-day NGOs in India. For that matter, the idea of people's action is rooted deep in India's history. Indian communities have for centuries found ways of joining at the local level to address shared concerns.<sup>11</sup> The reform movements, which were to influence so much of India's subsequent history, began in the early years of the nineteenth century led by pioneers and thinkers as Raja Ram Mohun Roy and Swami Vivekanand and organisations like Arya Samaj and Ramakrishna Mission. However, it must be noted that their concerns were mainly religious. Subsequently, the Societies Registration Act of 1860 was enacted which has regulated the NGO activity ever since. It can then be said that this reflected the emergence of citizen's institution in India.<sup>12</sup> The most powerful example of voluntary action was the Indian freedom movement, which Gandhi predicated on personal and community empowerment.<sup>13</sup> While resources and help was sought from the richer business classes, the essential strength came from thousands of dedicated workers and the support of the common man who felt that they were participating in the larger cause of national independence and reconstruction. Independence, in many ways changed all this. The common citizen now expected the

government to take care of all the problems.<sup>14</sup> In the late 60s there was a widespread realization that government structures were too rigid and standardised to evolve plans that would meet the varied requirements of this vast country. A new approach and style of working was required to evolve programmes in implementing them in a participatory manner to meet the requirements of the local people with more accountability and transparency and better quality of development and service delivery. It was the context of a certain 'weariness' with existing institutional arrangements and strategies, that attention once again, began to be focussed on the more rooted, participative experiments at 'grassroots mobilisation' for social change.<sup>15</sup>

The beginning of the nineties, however, saw a new trend i.e. voluntarism, as ideology came to be linked to liberalization as well as projected as an alternative. There are three reasons that point out to this: first, the increasing preference shown by international financial institutions towards voluntarism, second, the increasing availability of funds to voluntary agencies through international financial agencies and lastly, the projection of the primacy of development.<sup>16</sup> Linked to liberalization has been the withdrawal of the state, which some feel should make way for the voluntary (viz, NGOs) on the one hand and free market forces on the other. In fact, the shift to NGOs has been frequently justified as an expression of the emphasis on

<sup>11</sup> Ashoke Chatterjee, "NGOs: An Alternative Democracy", in. Hiranmay Karlekar, (eds), *Independent India: The first 50 years* (OUP: New Delhi, 1998), 282.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

<sup>14</sup> Sethi, Harsh, 'Trends within', *Seminar*, 22-23.

<sup>15</sup> Harsh Sehti, "Evolving accountability of voluntary organisations", in H. Dantwala, Harsh Sethi, & P. Visaria.

<sup>16</sup> Edward Mathias, "The emerging confrontation between PRIs and NGOs", in. S. J Raj, L. Sebast L. & Edward Mathias, (eds), *People's Power and Panchayati Raj: Theory and Practice* (Indian Social Institute: New Delhi, 1988), 61-62.



popular participation or participatory development and has been much favoured by multilateral agencies. (Tandon, Rajesh, 1996).<sup>17</sup>

### **Difference Between Early Voluntarism and Contemporary NGO Work Ethic**

Modern voluntarism is significantly different from the conventional voluntarism in form, content, approach, role, and impact. Conventional voluntarism was primarily aimed at charity and relief, or at best social welfare and social reform. It sprang out of religiosity, generosity and altruism. Idealism rather than ideology inspired it. While incorporating some of the elements of conventional, modern voluntarism is based on ideology rather than mere idealism. Therefore it aims at achieving development and social justice rather than relief and welfare. As a result, the tools, techniques, approaches and objectives of modern voluntarism differ from the earlier version. Today's voluntarism strives to change the social, economic and political position of the poor, the deprived, the oppressed, and the weak. In the final analysis, therefore, it aims at redistribution of power, wealth and status.<sup>18</sup> Informal functioning has now given way to more formalised structures and a professional set up. Employing professionals and experts, paying handsome salaries to the staff and implementing projects designed by donor agencies happen to be the characteristics of modern voluntary action.<sup>19</sup> Broadly, a shift in direction was obvious: from philanthropic, relief and charity to

participatory development efforts.<sup>20</sup>

A quarter century back, there was an epistemic shift in the voluntary sector from service to empowerment, development to political action. The drawing edge came from ideological commitment. NGOs whatever their organisational affiliation - Gandhian, religious or Marxist/Socialist - seemed keen to focus on the poor. As NGOs started offering a viable career option, the social base of their cadres slowly started changing. Given the new activity mix, more so of the intermediary support organisations, the emphasis shifted to skill and efficacy. They are, in relative terms, more concerned about themselves and thus relate differently to issues of accountability to their respective organisations as also to the people they work for and with.<sup>21</sup>

### **NGOs and Government**

The word NGO is a misnomer. It is not that the NGOs have nothing to do with the government but often their principal source of finance is the government of the country and the international organizations such as the World Bank and other specialized organisations funded by governments of different countries. There are also a small number of so-called charitable institutions funded at the expense of the government, which provide various types of tax exemptions and other incentives. For example,

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>18</sup> Anil Bhatt, "Asian NGOs in Development: Their Role and Impact", 77\*

<sup>19</sup> Alok Mukhopadhyay, "Upscaling NGO activity - Indian experience", *IASSI Quarterly*, Vol 14, Nos. 1&2, 1995, 37-8.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>21</sup> Harsh Sehti, "Evolving accountability of voluntary organisations", in. H Dantwala, H Sethi, & P Visaria.



the government might make available costly land for use to these organisations.

It must be stated, however, that any discourse on voluntary agencies needs to take into account the character of the state and its relationship with voluntary agencies. In a democratic set up, the state plays an important role. The relationship between government and the voluntary sector in India is not new. There was considerable financial support by the government for various voluntary activities, mainly welfare and developmental. Khadi and Village Industries Corporation (KVIC) build up an intensive network of institutions. Central Social Welfare Board and State Social Boards have been providing funds for counselling centres, NFE and vocational training.

The government agencies adopted several innovative programmes of voluntary groups and incorporated them into their own programmes. The increasing allocation of funds for voluntary agencies in the Five Year Plans (from forty million rupees in the first plan to Rs 2,000 million in the Seventh Plan) was a major step that opened a new era of government-voluntary agency interaction and collaboration.<sup>22</sup> The Seventh Five Year Plan for the first time accorded formal recognition to the role of NGOs in fulfilling their objectives and clearly asked for the involvement of voluntary agencies in the implementation of plan programmes, particularly in rural areas for poverty alleviation. From the mid-eighties onwards the Indian State increasingly recognized the role of

voluntary agencies in promoting grassroots democracy and people's participation in developmental programmes. This change in the government policy, in spite of the pronounced stand of most voluntary organisations to oppose and challenge the government policies for their failure, provided a vague clue to the emerging trends of the nineties. Niraja Gopal (1997) links this change in policy to the declining role of the government in the social sector and to the withdrawal of the State in the economic arena and the projection of voluntarism as the alternative for the liberalization policy of the nineties.<sup>23</sup>

However, government officials today are apprehensive about viewing NGOs as a magic solution. While not doubting their integrity and work, they generally view NGOs with suspicion. Proximity to powerful people, dependence on foreign funds and the emergence of a large number of bogus organisations have forced attention on the dangers of 'handing over' social services to them. They see 'honest NGOs' as effective partners in 'service delivery' - as agents or contractors of the government who are cost effective. Most government officials express reservations about involving NGOs in policy-making and programme development. They argue that foreign funded NGOs are not 'independent' - they could be the mouthpieces of their financiers.<sup>24</sup>

Governments and state agencies have been the most affected by the proliferation of NGOs and the early 1990s have witnessed a dramatic

<sup>22</sup> Alok Mukhopadhyay, 37.

<sup>23</sup> Edward Mathias, 61.

<sup>24</sup> Vimala Ramachandran, "NGOs in the time of globalisation", *Seminar*, 447, Nov. 1996, 57.



transformation in government-NGO relations. During the 1970s and 1980s, relations between NGOs and government were generally tense throughout the developing world. When an emergency was declared in 1975, a heavy curtain came down over free expression and activity. The shock was intensified, as activists in the voluntary sector became prominent victims. Within a year, other restrictive measures were enforced through the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) of 1976. Ostensibly meant to counter subversion, it became a thorn in the NGO's relations with the state.<sup>25</sup>

The receipt and utilisation of foreign funds to voluntary agencies began to be monitored under FCRA, administered by the Ministry of Home Affairs. This Act was introduced in response to government concern about the increasing volume of funding coming from overseas sources. It compels all organisations wishing to receive funds from abroad to register with the Ministry, to submit an audited account on a half-yearly basis and to provide details of each individual contribution. There was an amendment in 1984, which extended the definition to political organisations and barred them from receiving funds, obliged recipient organisations to specify in advance the bank involved in the transaction, and provided the government with further powers to inspect audited accounts.

As has already been said, the relationship which a

particular NGO shares with the existing government would also depend largely on the kind of activity it is engaged in. For example, NGOs which are either charity or welfare-type may help in the implementation of concrete developmental programmes and enjoy the support of the government but NGOs which concentrate on mobilising marginalised sections around a specific issue which might challenge the distribution of power and resources in society or focus on 'empowerment' because of their political nature may sometimes lead to a clash of interests.<sup>26</sup>

In India, the government tried to co-opt NGOs, through the Council for the Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) established in 1986. Then there were proposals (which finally did not materialize) to set up a National Council of Rural Voluntary Agencies (NCRVA). In fact, both a code of conduct for NGOs and the establishment of a National Council akin to the Press of Bar Council of India were argued. However, the move was strongly attacked and seen as an attempt to officialize the sector.<sup>27</sup> Enough evidences are available to support this view.<sup>28</sup> A recent furore was occasioned by a CAPART announcement that it was blacklisting many agencies on charges of improper financial practices. The need for codes of conduct and regulation is being debated, with some demanding official regulation and others that discipline must be self-imposed.<sup>29</sup> In fact, a survey conducted under the aegis of the Central Government showed

<sup>25</sup> Ashoke Chatterjee, 284.

<sup>26</sup> D Rajasekhar(eds). *Decentralised government and NGOs: Issues, strategies and ways forward*, (Concept: New Delhi, 1999).

<sup>27</sup> D. L. Sheth, & Harsh Sehti, 280-301.

<sup>28</sup> Edward Mathias, 67.

<sup>29</sup> Ashoke Chatterjee, 290.



that "fifty per cent of the NGOs which want to implement the welfare schemes of the government with government funds did not exist at all (Sarkar 1997).<sup>30</sup>

In the developing world, India has the second largest - more than 100,000 - number of NGOs, next to Brazil.<sup>31</sup> The number of registered NGOs has grown enormously, particularly since the middle of the 1980s.<sup>32</sup> It has been felt that the era of globalisation and liberalisation brought with it new NGO enthusiasts. Disillusionment with the public sector and India's own dismal record in providing quality social services to the poor, prompted liberalisation pundits, donor agencies and banks to champion the cause of the private sector. For almost a decade now NGOs have been seen as the magic bullet that would cut through red-tapism, inefficiency and corruption and reach much-needed health-care services, credit, education and so on to the poor. NGOs were seen as being more efficient and closer to the people.<sup>33</sup>

Yet another observer remarks that the withering of formal representative institutions has fuelled the explosion in NGO numbers. Since the mid-1970s, political parties have increasingly dismissed significant sections of the *dalits* (scheduled castes), tribal groups, Other Backward Castes (OBCs) and the poor and landless, as unrecognizable, while trade unions have failed to penetrate informal sectors of the economy.<sup>34</sup> It has also been opined that people find in NGOs an effective alternative

for implementing programmes without middlemen, bureaucratic tangles and red tapism. The approach had the charm of humaneness.<sup>35</sup>

### NGOs and Funds

To reiterate, the principal source of finance of the NGOs is the government of the country and the international organisations, which are funded, by governments of different countries. Almost ninety per cent of the NGOs are financed by external agencies. The others are financed directly by the Government of India and only a handful function with non-official funds. But here again they receive indirect government subsidy by many of the 'private' donations getting tax exemption on the donated money. Until quite recently, only non-official foreign donors were making direct financing to the Indian NGOs but the visit of the World Bank president to India in 1996 heralded the beginning of direct donations by the multinational agencies. The nature of this development, as one-commentator remarks, can be gauged when it is remembered that even the state governments in India cannot seek or receive funds directly from the foreign governments even for vital nationally-important projects.<sup>36</sup> By the early 1990 an estimated 15-20,000 NGOs were actively engaged in rural development and annual NGO revenue from abroad, Rs nine billion (US \$520 million), was equivalent to 25% of official development assistance to India.<sup>37</sup> When Indian government's contribution was added, annual income of Indian

<sup>30</sup> Edward Mathias, 67.

<sup>31</sup> Gerald Clarke, 36.

<sup>32</sup> V. M. Tarkunde, "The Present Scenario: A Bird's eye-view" in S. J. Raj, & L. Sebast (eds), 18-19.

<sup>33</sup> Vimala Ramachandran, 57.

<sup>34</sup> Harsh Sethi in. Gerald Clarke, 36.

<sup>35</sup> Alok Mukhopadhyay, 36.

<sup>36</sup> Subhas Chander Sarker, "NGOs: What is to be done?", *Mainstream*, June 28, 1997, 15.



NGOs, roughly Rs 10 billion was equivalent to 10% of the government's anti-poverty expenditure.<sup>38</sup> Between 1988 and 1991, NGOs were involved in 27.6 per cent of all new projects funded by overseas donors. This contrasts sharply with the corresponding figure of 5 to 6 per cent for the earlier period between 1973 and 1988 (Tandon, 1996).<sup>39</sup>

One commentator has estimated that over Rs 2000 crores come every year through the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) and the so-called registered voluntary societies receive another Rs 10,000 crores of foreign funds.<sup>40</sup> The easy availability of funds is one of the major reasons for the proliferation of the voluntary agencies in the country (recent estimate put the figure at two lakhs).<sup>41</sup> In the light of the above, it has been pointed out that 'independent' or truly 'voluntary' NGOs are rare. Over the last 50 years the proportion of resources generated by NGOs from the community has gone down significantly and voluntary work has become uncommon. Today, NGOs are almost totally dependent on donors for project grants. Given the changing international scenario, donor priorities change every few years. However, NGOs have learnt to adapt to changing international funding priorities, moving when the donors move. With the exception of membership-based organisations and those that mobilise funds from the public, the proportion of foreign funds have gone up by leaps and bounds in the last 20

years.<sup>42</sup> Though foreign funding has been an even more sensitive issue, the fact that it has provided significant opportunities for genuinely innovative and participatory action cannot be overlooked.<sup>43</sup> However, on the flip side, easy availability of funds has further eroded their autonomy vis-à-vis international voluntarism.

There are reasons though for preference of NGOs over government machinery. Influential donors see NGOs as an often more effective alternative for channeling their assistance, particularly after the candid admission by the late Rajiv Gandhi that less than 15 per cent of India's disbursements through government-controlled anti-poverty programmes actually reach the intended beneficiaries.<sup>44</sup> Today's voluntarism, unlike the sixties and the seventies, seems to be not particular about the ideology and sources of funding. More importantly, it appears to be more than satisfied with its expanding role.<sup>45</sup> Attraction of funds and projects may widen the area of operation of an organisation. But inevitably the focus shifts from people to projects.<sup>46</sup>

### Contribution of NGOs to Indian Society

It has not often been recognised, that some of the most important ideas in different development fields in post-independent India have emerged from the voluntary agencies. Chipko movement, Silent Valley agitation in Kerala, the consumer

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Gerald, 48.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>39</sup> Edward Mathias, 63

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in S. C Sarker, 6.

<sup>41</sup> Alok Mukhopadhyay, 37-8.

<sup>42</sup> Vimala Ramachandran, 57.

<sup>43</sup> Ashoke Chatterjee, 288-89.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

<sup>45</sup> Edward Mathias, 65.

<sup>46</sup> Alok Mukhopadhyay, 38.



movement (which, in fact is almost entirely voluntary in nature), the *Lok Adalat* idea, Self-employed Women's Association (SEWA)'s pioneering work in organising self-employed women are some of the innovative ideas with larger applicability.<sup>47</sup> Also, NGOs have influenced legislation in areas such as minimum wages, feudalism and bonded labour.<sup>48</sup>

Within the academic community the response has been mixed, with different scholars disagreeing on the importance they would give to this phenomenon. Kothari (1984a), Sheth (1984) and Sethi (1984, 1986) see in this a major grassroots political movement and a hope for deepening and a redefinition of politics in the country. The phenomena of activist groups and grassroots formations have, in their view, contributed not only to an articulation of new issues and styles of relating and working, a heightened consciousness and organization of sections of the oppressed and exploited, but also to major shifts in the consciousness and working of other sectors of society. While not arguing that the voluntary, non-party tendency can by itself take on the task of transforming the state and society, they attribute to it a major catalyzing role. The NGO phenomenon is, in our view, simultaneously a reflection of organizational innovation to respond to shifting market trends and an assertion of the irreducible autonomy of individuals and communities against an increasing encroachment by the state in daily life. This contradictory impulse needs to be captured to make the concept of

governance more amenable to the assertions of people's rights such that the state does not function from above, but is brought within the parameters of civil society.<sup>49</sup>

However, the faith that these small grassroots achievements would 'blossom into a macro movement for alternative development' (Sheth, 1984) seems to be shaking now.<sup>50</sup> Territorial expansion coupled with diversification into multiple sectors in order to survive frequent change in donor priorities have robbed many NGOs of their unique selling proposition - accountability, quality, cost-effectiveness and closeness to ground realities. They are also prey to the danger of being over-funded. Commenting on the changing nature of NGOs and pulls and pressures faced by them, Edwards and Hulme observed that with the disappearance of voluntarism, NGOs are increasingly being seen as contract agents or as the private sector in the development business. From being partners they are today viewed as contractors and the people whom they serve have been transformed from being a beneficiary to a consumer. NGOs have little choice. Their fear, particularly in today's climate, as more official programmes now involve NGOs, is that a blurring would take place between local government functionaries and them. As NGOs start chasing targets and become more accountable to the government or donor agencies, their internal criteria for validation are likely to shift, converting them into just another instrumentality, which unfortunately is not accountable even in the sense

<sup>47</sup> Kirtee Shah, "Critical questions", *Seminar*, August 1988, 15.

<sup>48</sup> Gerald Clarke, 43.

<sup>49</sup> D. L. Sheth, & Harsh Seth in. Kuldeep Mathur., 280-301.

<sup>50</sup> Anil Bhatt., 86-87



that politicians or administrators are accountable.<sup>51</sup> Some feel that the conventional spirit and intensity of voluntary action has been lost sight of. Programmes are now carried to the people. The members are no more the actual decision-makers. They have been reduced to beneficiaries destined to receive what the donors think desirable and proper.<sup>52</sup>

At the ideological level too there is a clear shift in terms of issues and concerns of voluntary organisations. The enormous expansion of voluntarism and easy access to funds and funding agencies may increasingly curtail the involvement of voluntary agencies at the grassroots level and also restrain them from supporting any mass movement for a radical social change. Clear signs are available to this effect since the beginning of the nineties, and no mass movement has emerged during the mid-nineties. Whether voluntarism will commit itself to the promotion of grassroots democracy by initiating awareness, orientation programmes and training workshops at the grassroots level will depend solely on the capacity of voluntary and non-governmental agencies to define autonomy over their resources and their agenda.<sup>53</sup> It has also been felt that even the professional groups who work in the field do so more as managers of development programmes, and rhetoric of participation apart, have little in common with (if not contempt for) the poor with whom they work.<sup>54</sup>

## Basic Education and the Jomtien Declaration

Basic education refers to a whole range of educational activities that take place in different settings and aim to meet basic learning needs as defined in the World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990). It thus comprises both formal schooling (primary and sometimes lower secondary) as well as a wide variety of non-formal and informal public and private educational activities offered to meet the defined basic learning needs of groups of people of all ages.

Basic Education for children is defined as "an initial education (formal or non-formal) extending in principle from around the age of three to at least age twelve. Basic Education is an indispensable 'passport to life' that will enable people to choose what they do, to share in building the collective future and to continue to learn. Basic Education is essential, if inequality, both between the sexes and within and between the countries, is to be successfully challenged".<sup>55</sup>

The World Declaration adopted at the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) held at Jomtien (1990) represented a world-wide consensus on an 'expanded vision' of basic education. It renewed its commitment to ensure that the basic learning needs of all children,

<sup>51</sup> D. L. Sheth, & Harsh Sethi, 296-97.

<sup>52</sup> Alok Mukhopadhyay, 37.

<sup>53</sup> Edward Mathias, 73.

<sup>54</sup> Harsh Sethi, in. *Seminar*, 22-23.

<sup>55</sup> Jacques Delors, *Learning: The treasure within*, Report to the UNESCO of the international committee on education for the twenty first century. (UNESCO: Paris, 1996)



youth and adults are met effectively in all countries. It recognised the need for an 'expanded vision' that would surpass present resource levels, institutional structures, curricula and conventional delivery systems while simultaneously build on the best in current practices. This would encompass:

- Universalising access and promoting equity;
- Focusing on learning;
- Broadening the means and scope of basic education;
- Enhancing the environment for learning, and
- Strengthening partnerships.<sup>56</sup>

It included in its ambit not only children but youth and adults as well. It talked of improving quality, reducing disparities, be it across gender or region. It recognised the need for special emphasis to be given to the socially, culturally or economically deprived groups and people with special needs.

It also maintained that the focus of basic education must be on actual learning acquisition and outcome rather than exclusively upon enrolment, continued participation in organised programmes and completion of certification requirements.

The scope of basic education was expanded to include early childhood care and education as well. It recognised the importance of primary schooling

as the main delivery system for basic education. It stated that supplementary alternative programmes could help meet the basic learning needs of children who had limited or no access to formal schooling provided they had similar standards of learning as of schools and were adequately supported. It also recognised that the basic learning needs of youth and adults were diverse and needed to be met through a variety of delivery systems. These could be training in skills, apprenticeships, formal/non-formal education programmes in health, nutrition, population, agricultural techniques, environment, science and technology, family life including fertility awareness, and other societal issues. The Jomtien Declaration also underscored the need for strengthening partnerships of all kinds including government and non-government organisations.

The objectives of the Jomtien Declaration were reiterated precisely to examine if there is a consonance between these objectives and the objectives and approaches adopted by NGOs. Whether the issues of both quality and quantity are addressed by NGOs? To what extent do concerns of relevant curricula, meaningful pedagogy, teacher training and process of evaluation find place in their work? How far do they cater to the needs of people with special needs?

When one talks of the EFA in the Indian context, the objectives underlined in the Jomtien Declaration assume special significance. The problems in India are multifarious in nature. There are not only infrastructural inadequacies but social,

<sup>56</sup> *World Declaration on Education for All*, WCEFA, New York, April, 1990.



economic and cultural barriers to education as well. Since the un-reached/out-of-school children is not a uniform, homogenous category, no one delivery system, be it private or public can be sufficient to meet their demands.

The right to free and compulsory primary education till the age of 14 years is a Directive Principle of State Policy (Article 45) in the Indian Constitution. The Directive Principles are non-justiciable in nature and that is the reason perhaps why this objective which was expected to be achieved within 10 years of the commencement of the Constitution still remains an elusive goal. Though the debate to make it a fundamental right under the 83<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act is going on, it still has not fructified as yet. The role of the non-governmental sector therefore, assumes special significance in this context.

## **Present Review**

There are no authentic sources that provide comprehensive information on NGOs working in the field of basic education. The present review is therefore based on a small field study carried out to analyse and understand in a focused manner the role and contrivutions of NGOs to basic education in India. Detailed profiles of activities were collected on about 80 NGOs selected from different parts of the country. Analysis of the profiles help gain an overview of the nature of involvement of NGOs in basic education programmes. Section II presents the major observations emerging from this analysis. Apart from this, in-depth case studies of seven NGOs was carried out. Summary of the case studies and the observations emerging from their analysis is given in Section III. The final section makes an overall assessment of the role being played by NGOs in basic education in the country.



## NGOs in Basic Education: An Empirical Overview

Estimates on the number of NGOs active in the field of education could vary anything between a few hundred to a several thousand depending on the type of classification employed and the meaning of education used. There is no comprehensive source or directory available which lists down the NGOs working specifically in the field of education leave alone basic education.

Even if there was, there would have been the problem of authenticity. According to the recently published, Public Report on Basic Education (PROBE), “NGOs actually play a relatively minor role in the education system as a whole (six out of the 188 sample villages they studied had NGOs working in their areas). The reason why one gets an impression that a lot is happening in this sector is because of

- government’s recognition of their role,
- good work tendency to expect a great deal from them, and
- public visibility – gives an impression that they are there everywhere<sup>57</sup>

However, the report also points out that their work has immense value. Pioneering initiatives by NGOs have drawn attention to new models of classroom pedagogy, teacher training, school management

and so on. Further, NGOs can also play a crucial advocacy role, i.e. in helping to foster public participation in schooling matters. Some of them are equally committed to the goal of UEE in a common schooling system. Their work is not a substitute for government schools, rather it tries to support them and to ensure that deprived children are able to join the same schools as other children.

In the wake of reports such as these and inadequacy of sufficient data available on NGOs working in the area of education, what conclusion should one arrive at? Given the facts that NGOs are scantily or unevenly spread or cater to a minuscule proportion of population or that they are no match for governmental efforts, should one discount their contribution?

*With the goal of UEE still to be realised and problem of innumerable children outside the fold of education still remaining, quantity continues to be an important problem to be reckoned with. But does it mean that issues, which are small, limited and local should not be given their due? Is one to address quality only after quantity has been tackled with?*

How is one to assess the ‘role and contribution of NGOs to basic education’ would largely depend on the framework of analysis that one employs or the parametres one chooses for assessing and

<sup>57</sup> Public Report on Basic Education in India, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.



exploring their worth. Though a quantitative analysis has its merits and does reflect important trends especially in the context of India's needs, it gives a one-sided picture only.

For example, the meaning of 'education' itself might become crucial in such a context. For, if NGOs talk of decentralization of educational structures, they also might refer to the curriculum as reflecting local needs and cultures. At one level, NGOs might help people realise that education is their 'need' and not something thrust upon them from above. At another level, they might try to make the very process of education stimulating and alive. In this context therefore, will it be fair to assess the role of NGOs in strict statistical terms? EFA is an important and basic goal in terms of which the contribution of NGOs has to be seen, but does that mean that several other parameters which are important to the functioning of NGOs be ignored?

*Though there are studies available on individual NGOs elaborating the kind of work they have accomplished. There is little information on their aggregate impact on education. Estimates on the number of NGOs active in education could vary anything between a few hundred to a several thousand, depending on the types of classification employed, and the meaning of education used. Some get their resources from MHRD others get foreign funds and are registered in the Ministry of Home Affairs, some have local, internal sources or generate their own funds.*

Even aggregate numbers will not provide a complete picture, as there are variations in their

number across the states as well. There are some states where NGOs are more in number, whereas there are others where they are scantily spread or virtually none. There are within-state disparities as well. There could be several reasons for these disparities. For instance, the influence of missionary activity in that area, the supportive role of the government, the educational scenario in that state, the availability of such self-motivated people in that area etc. Sometimes, however, lack of information about NGOs working in that particular area could also be one of the reasons.

It is important to realise therefore, that any statement about the NGOs will have to be qualified to avoid giving any false or misleading picture of the reality. To reiterate, in a country as vast as India, with huge differences across its peoples and states, and the NGOs characterised by a rich diversity of approaches, traditions and activities the task of generalisation becomes problematic, if not impossible.

### **Analysing the Profiles of NGOs in Basic Education**

As was mentioned earlier, this section gives the findings of the analysis of profiles of activities of about 80 NGOs. It was not easy to identify NGOs that could be included for preparing such profiles. To decide on the criteria, apart from studying various secondary sources, field visits were and discussions were held with a cross section of experts and In addition, field visits were undertaken to understand the situation in the states and interviews of a cross-section of people associated with NGO activity in education were conducted.



From these explorations, a comprehensive framework was formulated for selection of NGOs for profiling. The criteria arrived at is given in Table 2.1.

Preliminary analysis of the selected NGOs showed that they normally were concerned with activities in one or more of the following seven areas:

- Primary education
- Literacy
- Non-formal education (NFE)
- Education for street children/child labour
- Education for groups with mental or physical handicap
- Education for the marginalised or socio-economically deprived groups
- Education for the female gender

**Table 2.1 : Criteria Evolved for Selecting NGOs**

Criterion	Sub-types
Size (people, budget, area covered)	Small Medium Large
Nature of work	Direct (work at the grassroots level) Intermediary (support functions of research, documentation and training) Umbrella, funding organisation
Nature of activities	Concrete development programmes Mobilise people to demand for their rights and justice or to create awareness among them
Nature of organisation	Replicate and expand existing programmes Implement government schemes Innovate and experiment
Target group (age, special needs, gender)	Children Youth Adults Women People with special needs
Geographical area	Hilly Tribal Urban slums Desert slums Remote Backward



## Major Findings and Observations

### Objectives of NGOs Regarding Basic Education

As mentioned earlier, the term basic education was restricted to those NGO activities, which related to primary education, non-formal education, literacy and adult education, post-literacy and continuing education.

An analysis of the responses of these NGOs revealed that there were a variety of perspectives on basic education, which were reflected in the multiplicity of their stated objectives. There were some NGOs, which were working towards the attainment of one or two defined objectives. There were also others, which were working in areas more than one, areas which were inter-linked with one another.

There were some NGOs, which had a wider and more general focus like, empowering the community or organizing social education programmes. There were others, which were more specific in their aims like, reducing the dropout rate or preparing teaching-learning aids.

There were also varying perspectives regarding NGO's own role and status which was reflected in the way they visualized their work and organized their activities. For instance, some NGOs saw themselves in a supportive role or aiding in creating a facilitative environment for learning whereas there were others who directly intervened in the field and indulged in a very pro-active role.

It is difficult to dichotomise NGOs in terms of their

objectives as most of them, although had an uni-focus (i.e. of providing basic education), were multi-dimensional in their approach or specific goals. Some of their objectives either overlapped with each other or were similar but couched in a different language. There were some NGOs who, though had a multiplicity of objectives, had prioritized them and therefore gave them importance accordingly. It will be interesting to study the varying objectives of these NGOs as regards basic education.

There were some NGOs, which reflected on the nature, and meaning of education *per se* and therefore had objectives like providing:

- Life-long education to the people.
- Education which enables students to become self-reliant.
- Education which combines everyday tasks with spirituality.
- Education process which is creative, experiential and self-enriching.
- Education with a focus on vocational component.
- Education with a focus on health/environment.
- Education which is a combination of scholastic, vocational and entrepreneurial training.

*Non-formal education (NFE):* A large number of NGOs said that their primary objective was to provide NFE to children who either did not go to



school or who were working and therefore, the school hours did not suit them. Some of the NGOs simply implemented the NFE scheme of the MHRD as it was also easy to receive grants for them. There were others who were trying to evolve their own models of NFE and therefore also designing suitable teaching-learning aids for their programme.

*Literacy:* The aim of some NGOs is to imparting literacy and numeracy skills to people and bring as many people as possible within its fold. These programmes are meant for different groups of people like, children, adults, youth, women and the girl child. Some of them stop at providing functional literacy to these people whereas others go on to provide post-literacy and continuing education to these people, conduct follow up programmes to make sure that what has been taught is not forgotten and is being used regularly in people's lives. The larger goal of such organisations is to promote universalisation of elementary education.

*Re-designing curriculum and evolving teaching-learning aids:* The primary objective of these organisations is to question the existing paradigms and complacency about a given top-down curriculum and to make it more contextual and related to learners' environment and needs. Suitable textbooks and teaching-learning materials and aids are then prepared in accordance with the curriculum.

*Training:* This included training of teachers and conducting programmes for functionaries engaged in literacy campaigns or schooling as well as

organising training programmes and seminars for people at the grassroots. Training assumed special significance for an NGO, which was innovative in its approach and had a vision so that people involved in achieving these objectives shared a similar orientation.

*Empowering community:* These NGOs perceived education as a tool to empower people to critically look at their environment around them and respond accordingly.

*Spreading awareness:* Spreading awareness about the need for education in villages in people's lives, building a positive environment towards primary education, orienting teachers and parents for a participatory process of learning and making people aware about local, national and international issues were aims of a few other organisations.

*Enrolment:* There were NGOs which were working towards increasing the enrolment rate of children to schools, reducing/preventing the school dropout rate. This pertained to both schools as well as NFE centres. They had a clear quantitative orientation and believed in expanding the capacity of the existing structures.

*Pedagogy:* There were NGOs, which were involved in improving the pedagogic techniques to communicate with children both in conventional school set-up and NFE centres. In consonance with this goal they also evolved orientation and training programmes for teachers so that teaching was more child centred and participatory in nature.

*Education for specific groups:* Some NGOs had



objectives which were inextricably linked with the kind of people they reached out to i.e. their objective was to serve a specific group of people and evolved strategies and working styles in accordance with their needs. These people ranged from school children to working children, men to women, people in rural tribal areas to people living in urban slums and people with special needs.

There were a few organisations, which listed, very specific objectives that they were engaged in fulfilling. It is important to study them as well for they give a flavour of the diversity of the nature of work that NGOs are involved in doing. These objectives are:

- Providing Ashram school education for tribal areas.
- Promote Gandhian schools.
- Establishing libraries, organising children's fairs and competitions and setting up rural counselling centres.
- Coordinating primary schools located in one village.
- Developing physical, psychological and cognitive abilities of children to help them know their existing resources and environment.
- Developing relevant evaluation techniques for assessing the learning of students.
- Providing financial assistance to bright students for pursuing higher education.
- Organising pre-primary crèches *Balwadis* and

Early childhood education.

- Organising coaching classes for children studying in schools as an additional support as well as helping them to prepare for examinations.
- Acting as Resource Centre to disseminate information regarding basic education.
- Conducting study and research programmes on basic education surveys on school-going and non-school going children.
- Networking with national open school as a means of alternative certification for dropout children both from formal schools as well as the community.
- Facilitating partnership between NGOs and government and coordinating with other NGOs working in similar areas and sharing and disseminating their experiences.

These objectives clearly reveal the diversity of goals pursued by various organisations working in the area of basic education. Clubbing them under three or four broad categories would have perhaps facilitated analysis but hidden the essence of their work.

### **Sectors of Basic Education in Which NGOs Work**

The above section indicates that NGOs have a variety of objectives, ranging from very specific to very broad goals. However, in one way or another, these goals are related to pre-school, formal primary schooling, NFE, adult literacy and post-



literacy. It was important to understand the work of NGOs in relation to these sectors. These categories were given to NGOs and they were asked to rank them in terms of their work preferences.

Maximum number of NGOs accorded NFE as their first choice/priority. Pre-schooling came next.

pre-school were preferred. Then were listed formal primary schooling, adult literacy and post-literacy.

In terms of the last choice, post-literacy was accorded the top-most priority. This shows that post-literacy is not considered to be the primary objective of these organisations. It comes as a last choice or a least preferred choice.

**Table 2.2: Sectorwise Ranking of NGOs**

Sectors Rank Order	Present	1	2	3	4	5
Pre-school	13	18	13	11	04	02
Formal primary schooling	12	09	10	13	09	06
NFE	10	23	13	09	04	02
Adult literacy	11	07	10	13	11	07
Post literacy	04	03	06	05	14	13

**Table 2.3: NGOs Catering to Specific Target Groups**

Population	Number of NGOs	Percent
Children	63	84
Girls/women	57	76
Adults	50	66.7
Socio-economically deprived	46	61.3
Street children	39	52
Tribals	32	42.7
Handicapped/special needs	25	33.3

Formal primary schooling, adult literacy and post-literacy were placed after them respectively. This finding is in consonance with the objectives analysed in the previous section.

With regard to the second choice as well, NFE and

### People Served by NGOs

It is well known that some of the NGOs were established in response to the educational needs of a particular group of people. Who are these people? Does it also mean that a particular NGO



works only for a particular group of people which could be either in terms of age, gender or socio-economic status of the people or does it serve different groups of people in accordance with their needs.

There are some NGOs which were specially set up to cater to the needs of certain specific groups, for example, children with special needs or street children or girls. There were others whose primary

were also popular with these NGOs.

### Geographical Areas Where Basic Education Programmes are Conducted

Often, the driving force behind setting up an NGO is the backwardness of a place – geographical area or the socio-economic backwardness of peoples residing there. Therefore, it becomes important to see the

**Table 2.4: Area-Wise (Geographical) Distribution of NGOs**

Area	Number of NGOs	Percentage
Rural	62	83
Urban slums	34	45
Tribal areas	34	45
Hilly regions	25	33

objective is 'education', irrespective of the type of people they wererecaching out to i.e. there were no limitations with regard to the selection of those people.

Large majorities of NGOs were found to be working with children, though not exclusively. Most of the NGOs were found to be working for groups more than one. Women, adults and socio-economically-deprived groups of people

spread of these organisations in terms of their location.

The above table indicates the presence of NGOs in different areas. Most of the NGOs were found to operate in more than one or two areas.

There were, however, a few NGOs, which were working only in one area. The next table shows their distribution. The majority of NGOs worked

**Table 2.5: NGOs Working in One Specific Area**

Area	Number of NGOs	Percentage
Rural	16	21.3
Urban slums	04	5.3
Tribal areas	02	2.5



in rural areas. Urban slums and tribal areas were next in importance.

The above table shows that the rural areas were the most preferred work location. NGOs were also asked to rank their preferences. Very few of them did so. Out of those who did, their distribution is shown in the table 2.6.

The table reiterates that a large number of NGOs found 'rural areas' to be of utmost importance,

followed by urban slums and then tribal areas.

### Focus Areas of NGOs

Basic education activities could have a variety of focus areas. There were several aspects of basic education and it was important to find out, what exactly was the focus of these organisations, as the table 2.7 would indicate.

Most of the NGOs expressed that they were working in more areas than one.

**Table 2.6: Preference (By Rank) of Areas By NGOs**

Area	First	Second	Third
Rural	10	02	03
Urban slums	05	04	—
Tribal areas	02	04	03
Hilly regions	01	06	03

**Table 2.7: Focus Areas of NGOs in Basic Education**

Focus Area	Number of NGOs	Percentage
Mobilising community	60	80
Imparting literacy	54	72
Enhancing quality	49	65
Training teachers	34	45
Providing additional facilities	33	44
Providing teaching-learning material (TLM)	24	32



**Table 2.8: Ranking of Preference Areas by NGOs**

Areas	First	Second	Third
Mobilising community	11	05	01
Imparting literacy	08	09	01
Enhancing quality	01	02	07
Providing additional facilities	02	—	03
Training teachers	01	01	01
Providing teaching-learning material (TLM)	—	01	02

### Budget Allocation for Education

The total budget of the organisations towards basic education during 1998 ranged from Rs 2,000 to Rs 2.5 crore. This indicates that there were organisations with a very small as well as huge budgets working in the area. This is made clear in Table 2.9.

international funding agencies were the main sources of money for different activities of these organisations. There were some organisations which totally depended on foreign funding, whereas there were some which depended on government funding and avoided taking grants

**Table 2.9: Proportion of Budget Allocated to Education in 1998**

Share of budget allocated to education	Number of NGOs	Proportion (%age)
Less than 10%	05	6.7
Between 10-25%	24	32
Between 25-50%	14	18.7
Above 50%	23	30.7

Nearly 31% of the NGOs (only 66 NGOs responded to this question) spent more than half of their budget on basic education. About one-third (32%) had earmarked between one-tenth to one-fourth of their budget for the same.

### Source of Funding

Government – both state and central, national and

form any foreign organisation. There were a few organisations, which generated their own resources as well. Apart from the availability of funds, the individual organisations' principles also determined the source, which they tapped for money.

Apart from receiving funds from external sources like the government and funding organisations, NGOs also adopted a variety of ways to generate resources



for their activities and ongoing programmes. See Table 2.10.

More than four-fifths (83%) of the NGOs informed that they relied on charity and public contributions for in-house generation of resources/funds. Around 53% of them relied on membership fees and 41% on sale of reading

of them replied in the negative and only a small proportion of them said that the funds were sufficient.

### Role of NGOs versus Government

NGOs' perception of their role vis-à-vis the government was examined under four categories, as shown in the Table 2.11.

**Table 2.10: Sources of In-House Generation of Resources By NGOs**

Methods	Number of NGOs	Percentage
Charity and public contribution	62	83%
Membership fees	40	53%
Sale of material	31	41%
Fees form parents	03	4%
Agricultural produce	02	2.7%
Training programmes	02	2.7%
Consultancy fees	02	2.7%
Loans	01	1.3%

material published by them.

### Sufficiency of Funds

NGOs were asked if the funds received or generated by them were sufficient for their purpose. Almost 88%

A majority (56%) of the NGOs pointed out that their role was independent to that of the government as they wished to bring about innovations in education and carry out new experiments. Over half of them felt that areas neglected by the government of India was where

**Table 2.11: NGOs' Perception of Their Role vis-à-vis The Government**

Perceived role	Number of NGOs	Percentage
Assist	47	62.7
Intervene	47	62.7
Innovate	42	56
Neglected areas	38	50.7



they focussed their attention on. However, even a larger majority of them saw their role as one of assisting the government in implementing its programmes. Another 62.7% of them felt that they would like to intervene where the government had failed to meet its obligations.

### **Problems Faced by NGOs in Implementing Basic Education Programmes**

The NGOs pointed out several problems, which they faced in implementing their projects by virtue of the nature of work they were involved in.

First and foremost, they pointed out that professionals and experts were not easily available to work in areas, which were backward, remote and inaccessible. It was also difficult to find volunteers for their programmes. Due to meagre pay, it becomes difficult to recruit staff – both teaching and administrative – in these organisations.

There were financial constraints as well. The funds they received from donor agencies, be it the government or other private organisations were often insufficient and irregular. There was also delay in receiving funds. Sometimes, it was difficult

to find donors to fund new projects. At times, the life of a project depended on the grant it received due to which there was no continuity in the programmes. Some of them pointed out the bureaucratic hassles due to which work got delayed.

The people these NGOs worked for also posed problems due to their ignorance, illiteracy and financial constraints. There were practical problems as well. For example, it becomes difficult to access a part – tribal area during rainy season. At times, it became difficult to mobilise the community to working along similar lines.

The NGOs also pointed out the lack of infrastructural facilities, government apathy and lack of recognition for their work. Some specific problems pointed out by NGOs were – lack of availability of training material, small duration of training programmes, irregular supply of funds from the government, difficulty in motivating parents of girls to send their daughters to school, lack of interest on part of children due to malnutrition and other related problems. Other problems included lack of willpower of education department as a whole, consumerism in the field of education, reluctance on the part of the established system to for a relevant and meaningful education, interference of vested interests etc.



## Case Studies of Non Governmental Organisations in Basic Education

The case studies of seven NGOs were developed by people in the area of education who were specially contacted for this purpose. A preliminary analytic framework was prepared on the basis of which they were written. These organisations were studied in detail because they are fairly representative of the kind of activities NGOs were involved with. The differences in their structure, objectives, orientation, styles of working, patterns of funding, and relationship with the government reflect the differences which exist among NGOs and the manner in which they endeavour to achieve the goal of Education for All. *AKF* is a funding agency, which provides developmental and academic support to the NGOs it finances. *Eklavya* is dedicated to primary school education with its emphasis on curriculum, pedagogy, textbooks and teachers training. *Nirantar* is into women's education, with the aim of empowering them. *M V Foundation* is into streamlining street children into mainstream system of education. *Agramee* works for education and upliftment of the tribals. *IIE* is essentially a research institute which conducts action research and has worked extensively in developing a model of NFE. *BGVs* is committed in creating a nation-wide upsurge for literacy, spreading and popularising this message across the length and breadth of the country. A brief synopsis of these case studies is given below.

### Nirantar, Centre for Women's Education

This is a Delhi based organisation, active in UP (Allahabad), Gujarat (Kutih), Bihar (Patna,

Bokaro) and Rajasthan. Its central concern is with women's education. It conducts research into gender issues, develops gender-sensitive material for neo-literates, empowering women, helping them to participate in the political process and planning and training of field groups in these issues. It is affiliated with Indian association of women's studies and Mahila Samakhya (MS) programme.

The underlying assumption of Nirantar's work is that education should not be confined to the attainment of reading and writing skills but is should be a reflective process which can bring about change in society. Its main objectives are producing gender-sensitive material, conducting training in gender sensitization, participatory material production, undertaking action research, networking with various NGOs and government agencies and documenting innovative experiences.

In the initial stages, Nirantar worked in close collaboration with MS in Banda (UP). Its main activity was then confined to the development of curriculum for a residential educational programme for rural women. The curriculum related directly to women's lives and also dealt with diverse issues like, man's life on the moon, whales under water. The content related to five specific issues-water, land, forests, society and health. Various aspects of curriculum development – its content, pedagogy and teaching-learning material were evolved during this phase. Efforts were made



to develop the material keeping in view the home environment and living conditions of the learners. The objective behind this effort was to provide the learners with a broad-based educational programme, which went beyond literacy. Three parameters were considered relevant for elevating the position of women- literacy, vocational training and functional information regarding health and hygiene.

Nirantar engages its learners in further helping it in its other educational activities. Women themselves were made to recognise the need for literacy. Residential programmes were organised to impart basic reading and writing skills to them. The neo-literate women were subsequently drawn for future camps. Efforts were made to sustain these skills.

Nirantar did not restrict its work to Banda. The idea was to strengthen local groups and programmes to develop their own curricula. Nirantar also trains other people such as teachers, educational planners and NGOs to evolve curricula on specific issues in different field areas. The idea was to de-mystify the concept of a curriculum for field groups and ensure that the groups move from being passive users of available curricula and material to critically engage with the material. The trainees were provided with skills to enable them to create and design their own curriculum and teaching-learning material.

Health education is visualised as a continuing education curriculum that will be useful for teachers and facilitators of literacy, post-literacy, continuing education, village health workers and women's

groups. This curriculum is intended to help groups develop an understanding of health from a gender and class perspective, recognise and incorporate local health practices particularly women's experiences and existing knowledge. It is expected to empower women to take greater control over their health and provide them with an opportunity to build and develop their skills and information on health related issues.

Nirantar has also developed a language teaching curriculum to strengthen women's language related skills. The curriculum was organised around three areas relating to women-their identity, work and violence against them. These areas were given a concrete shape in the form of lessons, relevant stories and case studies. This material has been adapted and language exercises developed. A teacher manual with suggestions on how to transact the material and supporting information that will assist them in initiating discussions is being worked on. The material was field tested with teachers and learners. This curriculum was developed because Nirantar realised that women at Mahila Shikshan Kendra had high conceptual abilities but fragile literacy skills. They could understand complicated facts in an oral mode but could not comprehend the same information when provided in a written form.

Nirantar also provides need-based training to teachers in specific areas like, language teaching and creative teaching methodology through training programmes. It publishes Pitara-a news and feature magazine in Hindi for neo-literate. Local team of women trained and set up at Banda by Nirantar brings out a monthly newsletter.



Nirantar is a small group grappling with the question whether an expansion of its organisational structure would mean a loss of quality of their work.

### **Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti**

BGVS was formed in 1989, as a nodal organisation at the national level with the support and financial assistance from the National Literacy Mission (NLM), which was launched in 1988. The idea was that Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) and All India People's Science Network would undertake a countrywide Jatha, to create a national upsurge for literacy and thereby help in taking up a nation-wide movement for literacy.

The first major initiative of BGVS was the countrywide Kalajatha programme organised in 1990. It was a novel experience for most villages and it soon became a powerful medium of conveying a meaningful message through songs, skits and *nukkad nataks*, linking literacy with many livelihood problems. This Jatha managed to bring about spectacular national mobilisation and placed literacy on the national agenda and led to the birth of Total Literacy Campaign, which eventually became the dominant approach and strategy of the National literacy Mission. It touched 304 out of over 412 districts, covering 40,000 of Indian villages.

BGVS-II, was launched in 1992 and covered around 147 out of the 250 districts of the Hindi states including Orissa. Women played a major role in this campaign. Known as SAMATA-all these women Jathas covered other parts of India as well. These Jathas led to the building up of State and

District level core groups and grassroots networks of literacy activists and volunteers. By 1993, BGVS developed its organisational network and capabilities to take on resource support provision to the literacy movements to all States, except Maharashtra and Gujarat.

What began as a nodal organisation at the national level in 1989, thus became a major all-India network by 1992, with State and District level units in 18 districts/ Union Territories, either on its own or in alliance with other science networks, active in the State level. Initially BGVS was conceived as an agency for nation wide social mobilisation, positive environment, and building up of people's network to take up literacy work, but slowly it emerged as a resource State-district levels for the Zila Saksharta Samiti (ZSS) and the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC). It also became a major partner of NLM in conceptualising and explicating the approach and strategy of literacy movement.

The 1994-96 project of the BGVS, aimed at capacity building for the literacy movement from national to grassroots level, extending field support to Total Literacy- Post Literacy-Continuing Education (TL-PL-CE) programmes at the ground level, designing creative pilot programmes for strengthening the inter-linkages between literacy and UEE, health, drinking water and sanitation, Panchayatiraj and women development. Nation-wide campaign for creating reading interests, through publication and popularisation of neo-literates literacy materials, and a special Environment Building interest was taken up in UP and Rajasthan.



Its 94-96 project focused on "Mass Literacy, Post Literacy and Continuing Education, Health and Development" i.e. it continued to provide field support to the ongoing TL-PL-CE programmes and sought to strengthen and enlarge the inter-linkages between literacy and other sectors of development.

In 1997-98, there was a shift in the approach of BGVS. During this period it proposed to work in areas like, were TL-PL Reading festivals, Continuing Education, Non-Formal Education, UEE, Literacy- Linkages, Resource Literacy, Watershed Management, Local Self-government and people's participation and strengthening women participation.

By campaigning for a common cause of literacy and through it, a just and humane society, BGVS's endeavour was to create a broad 'organisation for literacy' and using literacy for the 'organisation of the non-literates and neo-literates' and to enhance their ability to negotiate with the iniquitous socio-economic milieu around them.

To reiterate, BGVS's contribution to NLM was that, it placed literacy on the national agenda. It not only provided the model it possessed, which had elements like the Kalajatha mode for environment building, but it also demonstrated its efficacy in Ernakulam and Kerala literacy campaigns, which later became the popular TLC model. It slowly graduated from a mere technical know-how agency to partnering with NLM not merely in masterminding TLC strategy, plans, explication of its implementation modalities at district levels, but also played a leading role in its actual

implementation. It also found ways and means of consolidating and strengthening the fledging literacy movement. Finally, two of its remarkable contributions have been- the identification of the literacy movement with women and second, is the value of voluntarism in the literacy programme which it demonstrated and, which gradually matured to voluntarism in other sectors of social intervention programmes.

### **Agragamee**

Agragamee was initially known and registered as 'Social Work and Research Centre' (Orissa) and was technically a branch of Social Work and Research Centre at Tilonia in Rajasthan. In 1987, the organisation got registered as Agragamee, which means 'pioneer'. The primary consideration which motivated the setting up of Agragamee was the 'tribal and deprived area' that Kashipur was. Kashipur was chosen because of its demography...it has a population with 70% tribal and 20% harijans. The area was challenging because of lack of communications, infrastructure and inadequate services. Stories of exploitation, bondage and molestation were common. Its forests were being destroyed by both tribals and contractors resulting in migration of tribals. A pilot project was carried out to analyse the existing socio-political climate, economic activities, infrastructure, natural resources, etc. in the area and to examine the possibilities of planned interventions.

The original plan of the organisation was to stay there for six years, build a strong people's organisation, and eventually withdraw as a non-



government development organisation. However, as Agramee took up the issue of release of bonded labourers and minimum wage issue, it got involved in court cases, it decided not to withdraw but to build up a training base there.

The primary focus of Agramee's programmes is the betterment of the status of the tribals inhabiting that area. For imparting education to them, therefore, it first assessed the problems specific to that area and found that the majority of schools in that area existed only on paper. Teachers were regularly absent and if present, were least interested in teaching. To top it all, they were not from the tribal areas and therefore, not familiar with their language. They perceived their posting to those areas as some sort of a punishment. The curriculum was alien to the children. The school calendar did not match with the seasons and festivals of the tribals. Morning hours of the school did not suit the children who were engaged in a number of household chores. Conditions of the school building were dismal. Education under the circumstances was naturally perceived as being undesirable and highly avoidable.

In Agramee's view which strongly believed and worked for the empowerment of the tribal community so that they could negotiate from a position of strength, an 'education process' had necessarily to be relevant and empowering to be meaningful in that context. Education was seen as something that the community regards as leading to their development as individuals, especially access to information, guard against exploitation and maintaining records in ongoing developmental work. So, with this aim in mind

Agramee started the NFE centres, popularly known as 'night schools', whereby a local youth with some education is selected by the community as a teacher. S/he undergoes training and attends workshops at regular intervals for this. A Village Education Committee oversees the schools and supports the teacher.

Agramee also runs innovative and experimental education centres, where some skill training, exposure through children's fairs and excursions are organised from time to time. It runs a residential educational complex for tribal girls as well.

Agramee views its education programme as an integral part of its larger development strategy. Some children from these schools manage to join the 'formal' schools and the 'Ashram schools'. These schools therefore serve as a bridge to the formal school system. Children here are exposed to a critical analysis of the cause of poverty, inequality, the situation of tribals etc. Parents- teachers workshops and meetings provide a forum for discussion on the school-the quality of education, performance of teachers, responsibility of parents etc. both tribal and oriya language are used as a means of instruction and communication with the children. The innovative centres have provision for Bal Melas, excursions and a wide variety of extra curricular activities. Children's Panchayat is an innovation that gives children hands on experience of the democratic process.

Hence, NFE and the innovative schools for Agramee become a means to achieve the larger goal of empowering the tribal community, of breaking the "culture of silence" and enabling them



to critically examine the socio-political environment around them.

(From protecting the jungle to coping with the road: Overview of Agramee's efforts to empower tribals to negotiate from a position of strength-Ramachandran, V., Velden, Frons Van Der, Panda Bijoy, Agramee: 1994.)

### M. V. Foundation

The Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation established in 1981 in Secunderabad, is a non-government organisation working for the development of rural community with special emphasis on the elimination of child labour and universalization of basic education.

The two primary objectives of MVF is the abolition of child labour and enrolment of all the children in schools. In the process of achieving these objectives, MVF seeks to create awareness among the disadvantaged sections regarding their social, economic and political predicament. Further, it aims at facilitating processes towards building of a civil society through collective action, participation and community-based initiatives.

MVF believes that all non-school going children are either potential child labourers or hard core working children. Formal education, especially in the formative years of a child's life in the age group of 6-14 years, is recognised to have an intrinsic value that cannot be under any circumstance be provided or replaced by any other means, be it the non-formal or vocational education. It believes that any child out of school is considered to be a

child labour, all work/labour is hazardous and harms the overall growth of the child, there must be total abolition of child labour and any justification perpetuating the existence of child labour must be condemned.

For providing basic education, MVF emphasises the strengthening of government schools rather than creating parallel institutions. According to MVF, poverty is not the crucial limiting factor but there are other non-economic factor which play a major role in influencing the parents in sending children to either school or work.

Therefore, contrary to the popular perception, MVF believes that there is a demand for education of the children on part of their parents. For the purpose of elimination of child labour and universalization of elementary education, all children are classified into three groups:

i) Those in school, which constitute the children of dominant sections-who are already educated, the children of the backward classes who do not have the tradition of going to school but whose parents are motivated and finally, those children who are themselves highly motivated.

ii) Idle children i.e. those children who have dropped out of school, children whose parents do not have the perseverance or skill to send them to school and children of the lower castes who do not have the traditions of literacy. These children are potential child labourers.

iii) Working children who are 'soft drop-outs', children who have never been enrolled in schools



and those children whose parents feel that children must be out to work as a natural course of life.

MVF further classifies the children into three age groups in accordance with their needs. They are 5-8 years, 9-12 years and, 12-14 years. Since the first group is not as yet hard core working children who would earn a wage income, MVF works for their enrolment into government schools. For this, intensive motivation and awareness programmes are conducted to encourage parents to send their children to school. The local government schools are also strengthened to accommodate the large influx of students due to the enrolment drive. Most of MVF's activities are centred around the 9-11 age group which according to them, is the most difficult age group to deal with. These children are already involved in hard core child labour and many of them have been bonded labourers. It is here that the question of child labour is really addressed- the child first needs to be withdrawn from work and then brought into mainstream by enrolling him in regular schools. For this, the MVF first convinces the parents that their attitude needs change, then to give the child worker the confidence that it is possible for him to study and get away from the drudgery of work and finally takes the children away from their home and away from their work and bridge the gap between these children and the school- going children in terms of their academic abilities.

For this the MVF organises Bridge Course where children withdrawn from work are brought to stay in camps for about four months of intensive training. The teachers also stay in these camps with the children for the entire duration of the

programme. The training given to children ensures that at the end of the camp period, these children are equipped to join the class corresponding to their age. Following the camp, the children are admitted into government schools and hostels. Thus the Bridge course is the essence of the MVF's strategy of withdrawing children from work and putting them into formal schools. These courses play a crucial role in transforming the child from a worker to a student. They are also instrumental in facilitating the conversion of parents from parents of child labourers to parents of a student. MVF encourages the starting of Bridge Courses in regular government schools as many of the enrolled children were quite old and required special attention.

MVF takes special initiative in the education of adolescent girls in the Ranga Reddy district. To break the traditional and deep-rooted norms and attitudes which discriminate against their advancement. MVF conducts short and long term camps for them. The teachers in MVF programmes are drawn from the community and are often first generation literates themselves.

MVF strongly believes that without community participation and support no programme is successful. It has strengthened the community through Parent Teacher Association, the VEC and Mandal Education Committee.

MVF feels that all these actions need to be put in an ideological framework for emancipation of child labour and shows the necessity and even the possibility of abolition of child labour through education. The crux of the problem according to



it lies in changing the established social norms, which would see every child in school as an acceptable social norm, and express outrage at the existence of child labour.

### Indian Institute of Education

The Indian Institute of Education, Pune has worked extensively on the non-formal education system and has evolved a model, which is being used extensively by other non-government organisations. It is interesting to observe the contrast in the approach to education and the problem of child labour with the M V Foundation. Contrary to MVE, IIE believes that the NFE is a viable and desirable alternative for working children.

IIE is a non-government organisation, a research institute which functions as a Public Trust. It was established in 1948 in Bombay but due to the availability of better facilities, the Institute was shifted to Pune in 1976.

The primary objectives of the Institute are:

- To conduct conceptual research in problems of educational planning and administration and their relationship with socio-economic development of the masses.
- To conduct large-scale action research especially in the rural areas of India, with the aim of developing innovative and alternative approaches for:

i) Universalising primary education and

continuing adult education

ii) Training young women and men in rural areas in science and technology.

iii) Integrating decentralised educational planning with other developmental areas such as health, social welfare, economic growth and political awareness, so as to simultaneously upgrade human and material resources through joint efforts of government, activists and the community.

The IIE emphasises inter-disciplinary research, both theoretical and empirical into formal as well as non-formal programmes of education, with special focus on policies and plans. One of the most important areas of IIE is the promotion of primary and elementary education. Hence, even though it essentially works outside the formal system of education i.e. through its non-formal education centres, it believes that it is possible to make a dent, a significant impact on the formal education system by means of a more interactive, relevant and learner-friendly non-formal education system. It also believes that education is necessarily linked with development, and education should necessarily lead to the development of individuals. It believes in Paulo Freire's paradigm of 'education for cultural action of freedom', whereby people are educated to be able to function as thinking, feeling and acting individuals.

It makes direct interventions in the field. These interventions however, are designed in such way that they do not disturb the social equilibrium, but discover solutions, which find space for themselves,



without evoking hostile reactions from the community. Its NFE is a good case in point. Without weaning children from their work, these programmes provide education to the working children at a place and time convenient to them. This is because the Institute believes that these working children are already placed in a 'learning context' and have their own valuable experiences and know-how of traditional systems. Apart from this, their work also provides a support system to their family and they should therefore, not be weaned away.

In consonance with its belief, NFE provides an education, which is pleasurable to its children, has relevance in their lives, and is convenient in terms of their time and place. IIE has evolved a unique curriculum for its learners under its NFE programme. Two important considerations in designing the curriculum are the distinct nature of learners who choose NFE and need to provide primary education of a good quality. It is designed in a way so that it lays the foundations of self-education so as to enable children to grow into competent, cultured and creative adults. The learning experiences are organised around the community and environment, as they were also relevant to the learner's context. In consonance with this well carved out curriculum, it has also evolved a suitable pedagogy for communicating with the children. Examinations also acquire a meaning different from the one in a conventional school set up. The idea is to make children learn and integrate the evaluation process with their learning experiences. The IIE believes that learning is not a uni-dimensional process and the pupil alone is not responsible for its losses and its gains.

Therefore, the NFE has evolved the concept of the Bal Jatra, which is essentially a fun-fair where each child demonstrates his/her achievement in singing, story-telling, acting, art-work, games, literacy, numeracy, reasoning, and social behaviour. Open evaluation of learners in NFE is an innovative practice developed by the IIE research team.

IIE has also produced reading material for neo-literates. They are organised into two categories- those having local contexts and using local language and those, having wider and general contexts. Local teachers, especially women are most suited to run the NFE centres.

Women's education and empowerment are given special emphasis. It has opened a Centre for Development of Rural Women at Shivapur, which focuses on the overall need for educating rural women to become active participants in the process of development. IIE also actively networks with other NGOs working in the area of NFE. ASTRA (Alternative strategies for education for all)- This project was aimed at forming a network of NGOs working in NFE and innovative approaches to education, all over India. The idea was to provide resource support and build their capacities by mutually sharing of ideas and experiences.

IIE is a unique organisation by virtue of both its organisational structure i.e. a permanent structure like the Center for Educational Studies, which is affiliated to Pune University, and other time-bound projects, and nature of work, which provides a unique mix between academics and field level interventions. It not only makes education available to out-of-school children, but also works as a



catalyst for change in attitudes towards gender-bias and poverty. It perceives education as a means of social change and development of masses and therefore, provides education, which is more meaningful, relevant and suited to the local community. The IIE, with its twin mandate of 'Education for All' and 'Health for All', with its fine mix between 'theory' and 'praxis', with its focus on the 'underdog', with its partnership with people at one level and government, intellectuals and other such organisations, at another level, has indeed stood by the objectives it initially set out for, way back in 1948.

### **Aga Khan Foundation**

The AKF is a private, non-funding development agency committed to the cause of social development of poor people in low-income countries of Asia and Africa. It essentially works in the area of health, education and rural development. The Foundation's education portfolio is divided into two distinct thematic areas- 'Young children and the family' and, 'School Improvement Programme'. It recognises the importance of early childhood care and development. This is a comprehensive objective, which focuses on the educational needs of young children in ways that are in tune with the cultural context of the family and the community. Special attention is given to young children living in poverty, where demands on parental time and lack of traditional support systems result in children's isolation and neglect. The objective of improving the quality of schools is achieved by training the teachers-on-the-job, producing low cost curriculum materials and reforming schools.

AKF is an umbrella organisation. It funds different organisations to carry out its various programmes. For its School Improvement Programme, it has four project partners- Bodh Shiksha Samiti in Jaipur, Aga Khan Education Service (India), Centre for Educational Management and Development in Delhi and Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies in Bombay, which look after the Education Management Resource Programme.

The AKES (I), which is a part of the Aga Khan Development network works towards the establishment of quality schools, thereby promoting access to education, creating appropriate and joyful learning conditions so as to retain students, preparing the students for higher education, professional or vocational courses and providing career guidance. The AKES (I) has launched its School Improvement Programme in seven schools spread across Bombay, Hyderabad and Warangal. It was started in 1989 with a view to improving the quality of education of the Aga Khan schools. It was a comprehensive programme that attempted to upgrade students, teacher quality and physical facilities. Though most of its programmes cater essentially to the Ismaili children, it has numerous other programmes, which look after the educational and health needs of non-Ismaili children as well.

The CEMD, carries out its project for institutional development in ten Delhi-based schools. These schools cater to the socio-economically and the historically disadvantaged communities. As opposed to school improvement efforts, which focus on teaching skills and



curriculum development, the EMRP focuses on enhancing the management inputs. It examines the efficacy of management inputs and assesses the manner in which they can significantly improve both the quality of education and the institution imparting it. CEMD adopts a 'systems approach' to study the entire system in order to understand the direct impact of any changes as well as other consequences if any.

The NMIMS in Bombay also believes that the quality of school education can be improved if the institution can be strengthened in terms of its management. It provides management inputs to nine schools in Bombay and eight in Ahmedabad. The philosophical thrust of EMRP is to bring about a change in the processes and attitudes in school organisations. It provides guidelines and direction to Principals of the school and trustees who are mutually responsible for fructifying the change and maintaining it. It follows an 'Organisational Development' approach, whereby the resources focused on management development are for Principals and 'core teams and on problem-focused activities.

*Bodh Shiksha Samiti*, the fourth partner of AKF started its work in the mid eighties as an initiative for providing primary school education to children of the urban poor in the slums of Jaipur. It was later expanded to seven slums. Approaches developed by Bodh over the years reiterate the importance of community and parental participation in educating their children. They provide physical space. Women groups are formed those support children and their families by visiting their homes every day. Curriculum and practice

evolved by Bodh seeks to make education interesting and activity- oriented.

The AKF is one of the premier funding organization working in the area of basic education. It has made its presence felt in India by concentrating its work in improving the quality of education in a few 'select schools. Though the AKF is essentially a funding agency, it works in close collaboration with the projects it funds. It works within the framework of the institutional setting of the school and funds projects, which regard these schools as organizations and try to bring about changes within them. Be it the SIP of the AKES (I), or school enhancing initiatives being tried in Jaipur, the basic unit of analysis and reform remains the 'school'. All its partners have the same goal, though their perspectives/approaches/orientation differs. Improving the quality of education in schools with the aim of trying out innovations, making the teaching-learning process a joyful, interesting and meaningful experience for both teachers and students and maintaining the sustainability and replicability of such efforts is the thrust of all the project partners of AKF.

AKF has certain priorities, parameters which, it gives importance to, which means that it is committed to the task of improving quality of school education. It realises that inputs in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, teachers training, community participation and management styles are all important contributors in this direction. Therefore it selects partners whose activities centre on these goals.

AKF thus stands in a unique position of not



confining itself to the role of a funding agency but also having a vision and a holistic perspective of education, which it realises through its various partners.

### **Eklavya**

*Eklavya*, non-profit voluntary organisation based in Madhya Pradesh, very consciously named after the prodigal Bhil youth 'Eklavya' who was denied the art of archery on account of his being a low caste is based on a premise which forces one to question the exclusiveness of education. It also inspires self-effort to master skills and knowledge. The *Eklavya*'s group's endeavour is to assist the *Eklavyas* of today to refuse to part with their thumbs.

*Eklavya* owes its origin to *Kishore Bharati* and *Friends Rural Centre*, two voluntary organisations that developed innovative curriculum, teaching methodologies and educational materials for science teaching. *Eklavya*, which was formed in 1982, pioneered the concept of activity-based science teaching in a few middle schools through the *Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme* in Madhya Pradesh. The idea was to essentially nurture the spirit of inquiry by the means of activity based teaching. The textbookish approach to teaching was condemned and a new model evolved where children would learn by performing activities and where their environment would work as a resource centre. An attempt was made to tailor part of the content around the environment and life of the students. The *HSTP* project constituted not only curriculum framing, pedagogical renewal and designing textbooks but to also an alternative

model for school administration, evaluation and examination systems.

*Eklavya* believes that meaningful innovation is possible only by bringing together professionals, teachers and children. It is possible to change the functioning of the government for implementing innovations at large scale and that science and technology are not esoteric spheres of thought and activity but should be rooted in people's knowledge and understanding and addressed to their needs.

It does not believe in creating separate enclaves whereby experiments in school education can be carried out but works within the already existing government school systems and thereby works with the existing teachers by training them in this alternative philosophy.

It also works on the social science curriculum for the upper secondary classes. This again incorporates the entire package, from re-defining the curriculum in terms of the learners' context, re-writing textbooks, training teachers in their use and changing the meaning of examination which is seen as an integral part of the process of learning rather than standing aside/apart in isolation.

Its work with primary classes was initiated so as to form a strong base for improving the quality of learning at higher levels. The primary school programme encompasses an innovative and integrated curriculum, teaching-learning materials, teacher training, and continuous professional support to teachers within schools. *Prashika*, an experiment in making primary school education a joyful one, was started in 1987. The essence of



learning was skill developing rather than simply memorising information by rote. Its primary education materials “seekhna sikhana” and “Khushi Khushi” were adopted for State wide implementation in collaboration with the State Council for Educational Research and Training.

To reiterate, its main areas of work are innovations in school education, publication of educational literature, science-society issues and facilitating participatory development. It has evolved innovative curriculum, teaching methodologies and educational materials for science, social science and primary education. The teachers, children and professional resource persons form a part of the team, which prepares these materials and tests these programmes under field conditions and constantly revises them on the basis of the feedback collected. It seeks to implement these innovations on a large scale through government structures like government schools. It publishes magazines and books on science-society issues for children, teachers and general readers. It runs children's clubs and activity centres. It undertakes dissemination of information on science and technology. It involves in field testing and disseminating in alternatives in technologies for artisans etc.

Eklavya visualises educational change as a complete package, which includes curriculum, text material, pedagogy, teacher training, evaluational and administrative arrangements. The teacher and the taught are perceived as being central to this process. It ultimately aims at influencing the mainstream education.

### **Cross-Linkages and cross-comparisons**

Each of the seven NGOs studied in detail is both unique in its character and yet at the same time shares certain characteristics with other organisations. Though some of them are fundamentally different from one another and have diametrically opposing principles, yet there are grounds on which they share common perceptions. It is important to highlight the points of convergence and divergence among them as it is these similarities and differences and variety, which defines their nature, making it difficult to draw simple generalisations about them.

### **Meaning of Education**

It is interesting to study the meaning of education employed by different organisations for that in turn shapes their goals, strategies and activities. The focus of Nirantar for example, is decisively women. Education for Nirantar therefore, acquires a meaning that goes beyond imparting literacy and numeracy skills to women. Education is seen as a tool for enhancing women's status in society and empowering them to critically reflect on their lives, question the existing gender equations and lead meaningful lives. Gender issues permeate through all the activities of Nirantar.

The meaning of education is often determined by the people that one wishes to serve. In this context, it is interesting to see parity between ‘Kashipur’- one of the most backward districts of Orissa, where Agramee works and ‘Banda’ in UP where Nirantar began its work. Banda is one of the most backward districts of UP-dacoit ridden, marked by



extreme poverty, low literacy levels and a high degree of violence against women. A significant proportion of its population belongs to the scheduled caste and the tribal community. In 1981, the year of Agramamee's inception, Kashipur where it deliberately and consciously chose to work with was inhabited by 70% tribals and 20% Harijans. The area at that time was underdeveloped in terms of infrastructural and communication facilities and other basic services. Literacy level was very low and network of educational facilities was very poor. Incidences of exploitation, bondage and molestation were also quite high. Problems of poverty and unemployment were also not uncommon.

Education for Nirantar must necessarily lead to the betterment of the lives of the women it serves. Similarly for Agramamee, any education to be meaningful for the learners has to be socially relevant for the tribals and the poor. It believes that education is the most important factor that can break the vicious circle of poverty, exploitation, prone-ness to ill-health and mortality. Education is seen as a process, which would enhance the self-confidence and knowledge base of the tribals to enable them to make informed choices.

For AKF the perspective of education is also similar to those of other organisations though the manner in which it achieves its goals is different. Education is seen as an integral part of people's lives and one, which has a linkage with their health and their mother's needs. Its aim is to improve the quality of education in

ceratin select schools and this it does both by enhancing the curricular and pedagogic inputs to education and providing managerial inputs to schools.

For BGVS, the essential aim was to create a national upsurge for literacy and thereby facilitate in taking up a nation-wide movement for literacy. It had a clear focus and it endeavoured to bring as many people as possible in the fold of literacy.

### Nature of Activities

Nirantar evolves curriculum for its learners and also helps people in evolving their own curricula. The curriculum evolved is essentially linked to literacy, vocational training and functional information regarding health and hygiene etc. The idea was to provide an education to learners, which made sense to them. The content of the curriculum related to five specific issues-land, water, forests, society and health. Nirantar's work is quite unique because it trains other people such as teachers, educational planners and other NGOs as well to evolve curriculum on specific issues in different field areas. Nirantar works for adult women and girls and its aim is not just to teach some nominal literacy skills to them but to really understand the society in which they live and use literacy as an aid in that.

Agramamee essentially provides education of a non-formal type for working children who hail from tribal and other marginalised communities. Innovative games are designed to facilitate learning among children. Agramamee does not see education in isolation. The education programme



is an integral part of its larger development strategy. It integrates income-generating activities with its education programme. This is because children work to contribute to the livelihood of their families in tribal areas so an education, which has no scope for earning income, will not have much meaning for the tribal people.

The IIE is placed in a unique position. It is both a research institute whereby it guides students for their M.Phil and Ph.D degrees and an organisation bringing about significant changes directly in the field. It conducts conceptual research in problems of educational planning and administration and action research for developing alternative approaches for UEE and continuing adult education, training youth in rural areas in science and technology and integrating decentralised educational planning with other development areas. Field testing is paramount to their work and in this respect its work parallels with that of Eklavya and Nirantar.

### Strategies Adopted

MVF and IIE both work for working children but there is a stark contrast in their beliefs and manner of functioning. For instance, IIE believes that NFE is a good substitute of formal school education for working children who find it difficult to attend schools in their regular working hours. The NFE in this case is carefully thought-out and creatively and sensitively designed so that it relates to children's lives and is of use to them. IIE on the other hand, believes that NFE is not only a viable but also a desirable alternative for working children. It believes that there is nothing wrong in

a child working and that context itself becomes a 'learning context' so there is no reason why a child should be weaned away from it. Since children are working and are unable to join school, NFE is the only desirable option, which provides them meaningful education, skills that they might use in their daily lives, at a time and place convenient to them. IIE feels that even if these children cannot avail schooling facilities, atleast they should not be deprived of an NFE which will be more suitable to them.

MVF on the other hand is totally against the concept of NFE. This is because NFE would imply letting children stay in the world of work and at the same time giving them an education which is convenient to them in terms of its time and place so that it does not come into conflict with their work schedules. In other words, even though children are given education, it is of a type, which does not require them to leave their respective jobs, and therefore, they continue to be child labourers.

The IIE however, has evolved a model of NFE for its working children, whereby they address the three important pillars of the education system i.e. curriculum, pedagogy and examination system. This is done in the context and lives of working children of some villages in and around Pune. Curricular knowledge constitutes something that the children can relate to and use in the course of their daily lives. The pedagogy evolved for these NFE centres is child-centred where children are not made to feel 'passive learners or recipients' but participate actively in the learning process. The teacher is one among them and communicates with the children in their own language. The fact



that these children are working and by the time they come to school at night they are tired and therefore, have limited attention spans kept in mind. The 'examination' is like a fun fair. It is like a Bal-Mela where children go around exhibiting their knowledge to others. There is no fear of performing in front of others for evaluation. Infact, the Mela becomes an important means to show off one's achievements and talents. So evaluation becomes an integral part of the learning process and not something which happens at the end of the year, something to be scared of as a necessary evil. The process of examination hence acquires an entirely different meaning in this context.

MVF believes that every child out of school is a child labour and must ultimately be brought into the fold of mainstream school education after being completely weaned off from their work. MVF has designed a strategy of withdrawing children from work and admitting them in classes corresponding to their age. It is quite unique in its endeavour. Bridge course is a unique feature of this organisation-a four month residential intensive training camp for children-to help them bridge the gap between their world of work and the world of school. These camps help these working children to reach the level of children already studying in formal school set up Initially a learning atmosphere is created to prepare the child for a full-time learning experience. Then reading, counting and mathematical skills are imparted through activities. Lastly the child is shifted to the existing school curriculum and system of learning. During this phase textbooks for different subjects are used and the child's understanding in different areas is developed. NFE materials and methods are used

to prepare children for higher classes in a formal school set-up.

Organisations like Eklavya maintain a strong link with the field reality as well as the world of academics. Eklavya for instance, among many other areas, works for enhancing the quality of school education. It has evolved an integrated model of teaching, by combining a learner-centred curriculum and innovative textbooks along with an open-book examination system. An open-book examination system de-emphasises the excessive importance that a conventional or a closed-book examination gives to memory. It addresses many more cognitive and affective skills of children so as to enable them to meaningfully integrate the text with their experiences and environment. By means of a child-centred curriculum and pedagogically sound textbooks, children are taught several ways in which information can be used and interpreted. The teachers are also oriented and trained in this methodology. Eklavya's HSTP liberated science from the lifeless pages of a textbook and took it closer to children-their hands, their minds and hearts. Science was understood for its true worth- as an everyday experience to be lived with, to feel and enjoy, to question and discover, rather than something that was to be read, memorised for examinations and subsequently forgotten.

The strategies employed by the Aga Khan Foundation for fulfilling its objectives are quite different from the other organisations. AKF is an umbrella organisation, essentially a funding organisation which works in close collaboration with the different NGOs that it funds. Improving



the quality of education is its main objective and two of its project partners, which work towards realising it are CEMD in Delhi and NMIMS in Bombay which try to improve the quality of the school by enhancing its management inputs. Between the two of them also, the CEMD and the NMIMS use different approaches. The AKES, I, another partner of the AKF on the other hand tries to improve the quality of school education by providing inputs at the pedagogic level. The fourth partner of AKF is Bodh, an NGO works for the enrichment of the curriculum in seven schools located in the slums of Jaipur.

The aim of BGVS, which was to spread awareness for literacy organised an innovative way of reaching out to people. Its Kalajatha programme for villagers was a powerful medium for conveying a meaningful message through songs, skits, street theatre, thereby linking literacy with livelihood problems. This Kalajatha managed to bring about spectacular national mobilisation and placed literacy on the national agenda and led to the birth of Total Literacy Campaign. The BGVS essentially began as a nodal organisation at the national level in 1989 and eventually became a major all-India network by 1992. Initially it was conceived as an agency for nation-wide social mobilisation, positive environment, and building up of people's network to take up literacy work, but slowly it emerged as a resource State-district levels for the Zila Saksharta Samiti (ZSS) and the Total Literacy Campaign. It also became a major partner of NLM in conceptualising and explicating the approach and strategy of literacy movement.

### Sources of Funding

There are some NGOs, which receive financial assistance from international funding organisations whereas there are some others which as a matter of principle avoid taking any grants from the foreign donor agencies, lest their terms and conditions dictate them. Eklavya for instance has taken a policy decision to not accept any money from any foreign funding agency perhaps because these agencies might have an agenda, which may not be sensitive to the local priorities. Nirantar receives financial help from international funding organisations like UNICEF, Ford Foundation and the German Foundation. IIE also receives foreign funding. AKF on the other hand is itself a funding organisation. Though it receives funds from certain organisations which in turn it gives away to grassroots organisations which have goals and priorities similar to its own.

### Relationship with the Government

Aragamee makes a conscious decision to participate in a number of government programmes, mainly as a mechanism to seek legitimacy for its awareness building and other mobilisation programmes and sometimes to overcome acute financial crises. It recognises that the government is a major player in the development process in tribal areas. Since the government has a constitutional responsibility towards the community and therefore, Aragamee strives to collaborate with the government towards the realisation of the mandate of the Constitution. It extends its



support to pro-poor, pro-tribal policies of the government, especially Panchayati Raj institutions. However, it also acts as a critic of anti-poor and anti-tribal policies of the government. Infact the government of Orissa banned some of the activities, which it thought went against the interest of the state.

Similarly, Eklavya prefers to work in the government schools rather than creating separate enclaves for itself where its experiments can be tried out. The AKF on the other hand works in the Aga Khan schools and tries to improve the quality of education of its schools by enhancing the pedagogic inputs and improving the managerial aspects of their functioning. They work within the constraints of a given state curriculum. Eklavya on the other hand has designed curriculum for school children at different levels for different subject areas and has got recognition from the state government itself. MVF also prefers to put the working children after weaning them from their

world of work into government schools rather than creating parallel institutions for them. IIE also works in close collaboration with the government of Maharashtra and implement its various NFE programmes.

### **Networking**

There are quite a few organisations, which actively endeavour to work with other organisations and share their experiences and expertise with them. IIE has formed ASTRA-alternative strategies for education whereby it identifies organisations which try out educational innovations in different states in India and bring them together and form a kind of consortium for mutual capacity enhancement in the interest of education for all.

Similarly Eklavya, Nirantar, BGVS and AKF all work in one way or another with other organisations and constantly seek to network with them.



## Conclusion

After reviewing the existing literature in the field of NGOs, studying the broad patterns of some seventy five NGOs and analysing seven NGOs in detail, where does it really leave us? How far have the NGOs contributed to basic education in this country? It is a well-known fact that NGOs have been existing in India for over a long period and have contributed immensely towards its various developmental programmes. However, the nature and orientation of these organisations have changed tremendously. Earlier they were largely welfare and reform oriented, existing more like charity organisations. Now they are more focussed and professional in their approach. NGOs represent people's initiatives at one level and offer alternative models of development. They are more flexible in their approach and suited to meet the varied requirements of this vast and diverse country. On one hand, their growth can be seen in relation to the inability of the government structures to fulfil emerging needs and on the other hand, they can be understood as a response to the increase in funding from international funding organisations—a direct fall-out of the globalisation and liberalisation policies followed by the government of India.

It is not that the NGOs always work in opposition with the government, always offering alternative models of development but NGOs in this country have also worked in tandem with the government both at the state and at the national level. A large

number of NGOs receive funds from the government and even implement government sponsored schemes. After the Indian government officially recognised the role of NGOs in alleviating rural poverty in its Seventh Five Year Plan, the government actively aligned itself with the non-governmental sector not only in poverty alleviation programmes but also in providing education to its people. This came with the realisation that the magnitude of the problem in the educational sphere was far too great to be achieved by a single delivery system, be it public, or private or voluntary in nature. Since the non-government, voluntary sector was anyway active in this field, it was decided to give a further push to them.

To reiterate, there is a tremendous diversity among the non-government organisations. NGOs are not a homogeneity entity. In the field of education, also there are several differences found among them. They differ from each other not only in terms of their size, structure, funding pattern, relationship with the government etc. but also in their objectives of basic education, perspective of education, people they cater to, areas they serve in and the nature of their work. For instance, whereas one NGO could be interested in imparting literacy and numeracy skills to people, another could be engaged in spreading awareness for literacy and still another could be involved in actual classroom related processes like, curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher training.



The people living in India are not a homogenous lot. There are differences across people in terms of gender, region, religion, caste and socio-economic class etc. There are NGOs which are formed precisely to cater to some specific groups of people. For instance, there is still a gender bias against girls in our society and so there are NGOs that specifically look after the needs of the fairer sex. Not only in terms of making education more accessible to them but also empowering women to take command of their lives, to question the oppressive patriarchal structure of the society. Similarly, there are children who are either mentally or physically challenged and there are some NGOs that are specifically formed for them. This group has special needs and some of the NGOs feel that they are often neglected and therefore, needs to be taken care of. Then there are the tribals who are outside the mainstream system of education and therefore, need to be viewed with sensitivity, rather than imposing an alienating education system which they cannot identify with.

NGOs work with a variety of social groups and age groups in this country and provide education which is in accordance with their needs and relevant to their social context.

The geographical area where an NGO places itself is often the most important consideration for its existence. The people living in a particular area by virtue of its location may be placed in a disadvantageous position and therefore, need special attention... There are rural areas, urban slums, hilly areas, tribal areas which could be at a disadvantage because of their location and the accessibility and quality of education suffers in

these circumstances. That is the reason why NGOs place themselves in these areas and function from there.

What should be the criteria on the basis of which NGOs' contribution to education be assessed? Should an increase in the overall literacy rate and universal elementary education, be the criterion for examining their role? Are a cent-per-cent literacy rate, high enrolment rate and low drop-out rate of children adequate measures to study their effectiveness? Or should there be space to reflect on questions like, the actual meaning of education employed, a critical examination of the classroom processes and an analysis of the significance and relevance of such an education in one's life. In case their assessment is made purely in quantitative terms that will mean discounting their role because that alone is not their objective as has been examined. NGOs address a wide variety of issues and their contribution needs to be studied in their own terms rather than imposing an external criteria on them. Closely linked to this is the question of quality versus quantity.

While assessing the work of NGOs, what is more important-the number of people they are able to reach out to, or the manner in which they try to reach out to people?

Should an organisation which is reaching out to a large number of people be considered effective, or should an NGO whose reach is limited and local but is addressing the needs of a people who need special attention or have been deprived, ignored and neglected over the years be considered more effective?



UEE still remains a goal to be achieved, there are innumerable children who are outside the fold of education and quantity is still an important problem to be reckoned with in our country, but does it mean that NGOs which raise issues which are important but small, relevant but limited not be given their due. Is one to address quality only after quantity has been tackled with?

Does the role of NGOs become important because the government is not being able to meet its obligations or can their work also be studied independently from that of the government. There is no doubt about the fact that NGOs have come to occupy an increasingly important role due to government's failure to provide education to its people. Some NGOs have indeed come up either, in reaction to the governmental way of doing things or to strengthen and the support the government. Does it therefore, mean that NGOs can be studied only with respect to the government? There might be a vast difference in the objectives of the government and the non-government sector and the manner in which they achieve them but it is this difference which forces one to study the role of NGOs in their own light.

The central argument of this paper is that since NGOs are not a homogenous group, and there are innumerable differences found among them, for their work to be understood in its proper context, one must make sense of their differences and understand their work and the principles which guide their strategies.

What is it that the NGOs mean by education? Does education have a meaning that is common to all?

It is important to understand the manner in which NGOs really look at education. For that to a large extent, will explain the type of work they are engaged in doing. As has been seen, there are varying perspectives in this regard. There are some NGOs who regard education as an important end in itself. In this case, their objectives are specific as well. Like, teaching literacy, numeracy skills to people, establishing educational structures like schools, or creating non-formal education centres. There are others, for whom education is a means to an end i.e. they emphasise on the 'empowering' effects of education, enabling people to develop a critical, questioning attitude, be it towards the unequal distribution of resources in society, or towards the existing gender or cultural stereotypes, or towards the classroom processes/learning *per se*.

Education also assumes a different meaning when it is given to groups of people who have special needs, or when it caters to people who are in a disadvantageous position in society, or reside in a particular area which is either geographically isolated or poorly developed. So these NGOs try to give an education which is relevant to those people in their context and is in accordance with their needs. For example, education for NGOs working with children with special needs might mean imparting self-help and functional skills to them. Education for NGOs who are working with the deprived sections of the community would mean empowering people and enhancing their self-confidence and self-esteem and fight against the ineuitable structures in society..

The aim of some NGOs is not simply to enrol children in schools, but to see that the education



they get in schools is something that makes sense to them, something to which they can relate and something which gives them joy. Therefore, there are NGOs that are concentrating their efforts on re-defining the school curriculum, re-designing textbooks and also training teachers in progressive and child-centred pedagogy. For some NGOs, education also means providing vocational training, with on the instrumental aspect of education, preparing people to get gainfully employed in the economy

There are various layers of meanings hidden beneath the broad spectrum of education. It becomes vital to understand all of them in order to get a holistic picture of the working of these organisations, placed as they are in a heterogenous society with its multifarious complexities at the socio-economic and cultural level.

In consonance with their perspective of education, NGOs have specific objectives as well.

The broad sectors where they work are primary schooling, literacy, non-formal education, post-literacy and continuing literacy, adult education, pre-school and early childhood care and education, curriculum reform, textbooks designing, teacher training, improving the management inputs to education, research, documentation of material relevant in this field and networking with other NGOs. While goals of some of the NGOs are dictated by the already-existing government-sponsored programmes, like a particular NGOs might simply help in implementing the NFE scheme at a particular place whereas another one might try and evolve new and creative models of

pedagogic practices in the class room.

NGOs draw money from both government and private funding organisations. Government, both state and central and national and international funding agencies are often the main channels through which money for different activities flows in these organisations. There are some organisations that depend totally on foreign funding, whereas there are others which depend on government funding and avoid taking grants from any foreign organisation. There are a few organisations which generate their own resources as well. The decision to take money from either internal sources (could be the government or local funding organisations) or foreign funding agencies is determined both by the policies of that particular organisation or practical considerations. While there is less of bureaucratic hassles and red tapism in getting money from the international donors, there is also the fear that local needs and priorities might get submerged by international priorities. It is well known that the NGOs often shift their goals to suit the priorities of the donor agencies to facilitate easy inflow from them. While there is fear of loss of autonomy in receiving money from the international funding agencies, there is also the advantage of legitimising its activities by receiving money from the government of the country in which they are based.

In spite of the many differences existing among the non-government organisations there are certain features common among all of them. NGOs do manage to take the beneficial programmes right to the doors of the people. They work at grassroots, in remote areas, and therefore their reach is much



wider. They are closer to ground realities and know the needs of the communities, their approach with the target group is direct, empathic and therefore they are able to draw more contextualised plans of action. They also manage to develop intimate contacts with the people and develop confidence among them.

Given the nature of non-government organisations and inadequacy of data about them all, it would perhaps not be feasible to overly generalise about them for that would give a misrepresentative picture of the reality. On one hand, work of some of the organisations is being repeatedly written about, whereas there are a lot others which quietly do their work, some of them even deliberately avoiding any kind of publicity. On the other hand, a few well-known organisations manage to get so much publicity that they give an inflated picture of the total number of organisations working in this field and about the kind of work they are actually doing. The relationship between the government and the non-governmental sector is also not necessarily only 'cooperative' or 'confrontationist' for there have been times when a particular organisation enjoying support of the

government suddenly turns hostile on charges of evoking public sentiment against the government structures. There is no fixed pattern or paradigm that can explain the working of these organisations for all times to come. There are more shades than two and that is why it is important to recognise the diversity of these organisations, be it in terms of their objectives or strategies and then understand their work. For instance, not only have these organisations managed to make a lot more people literate than what would have been possible by the government structures alone, they have tried to critically examine the deeper questions of the 'type' and 'relevance' of education for its learners. While some organisations have helped the government in replicating its programmes, others have even evolved alternative models of both non-formal and formal systems of education. Whatever be the diversity and complexity in understanding the work of these organisations, there is no doubt about their contribution in taking India closer to the goal of providing education for all, be it in terms of a quantitative expansion or a qualitative change in the meaning of education and the process of education itself.



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